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CREEDS, CHRISTOLOGIES AND RELIGIONS

**Edited by
Jacob Parappally**

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A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

Creeds, Christologies and Religions

Edited by:
Jacob Parappally

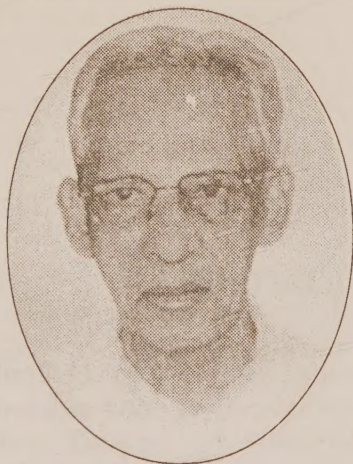
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THIS ISSUE OF JEEVADHARA
IS DEDICATED TO THE LOVING MEMORY OF
JOHN BRITTO CHETHIMATTAM,
INDIA'S EMINENT THEOLOGIAN-CUM-PHILOSOPHER,
WHO WAS ONE OF JEEVADHARA'S FOUNDING MEMBERS
AND EDITOR OF ITS DIALOGUE ISSUE AND ITS BOOK-REVIEW EDITOR
RIGHT FROM ITS BEGINNING UNTIL HIS DEATH,
WHO NEVER FAILED TO BRING OUT HIS ISSUE IN TIME
AMIDST HIS HECTIC SCHEDULE OF
TEACHING THEOLOGY IN INDIA AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE STATES.
WE EXPRESS OUR DEEP SORROW
AT HIS DEATH ON 31 MARCH, 2006
WHICH IS A GREAT LOSS TO JEEVADHARA AND ITS PH.D. PROGRAMME
AS WELL AS TO THE CHURCH IN INDIA

JOSEPH CONSTANTINE MANALEL
General Editor



Editorial

Do the creeds divide people? Many answer this question in the affirmative. Further they would observe that while creeds divide people symbols unite them. There are others who would assert that creeds are meant to divide people. Every religion has its creed, code, cult and community and these give identity and uniqueness to a particular religion. Therefore, the creed defines a religion and sets boundaries for its beliefs and practices. Within the religion heretics and dissenters are not tolerated and outside the religion there are only gentiles, pagans, infidels and *astikas* who are to be separated from the believers. When the creeds of one's own religion are celebrated with exaggerated realism other's creeds are often ignored, ridiculed or explained away as sinful human attempts to capture the Absolute in some meaningless words and imageries produced by some fertile and creative minds. It is true that creeds give identity to a religion. However, if more importance is given to the words of the creeds than what they mediate to communicate to the believer they beget bigotry and fanaticism. In the past wars were fought, innocent persons were burned at stake, houses were torched, properties destroyed and thousands were imprisoned; all in the name of creeds. This is not a story of the past. Recently, the outbreak of violent reactions to a Danish cartoon allegedly hurting the religious sentiments of some people took away the lives of dozens of innocent people and injured a large number of people who would have never known why they were made victims of such a cruelty.

Creeds need not divide people. If deconstructed properly and reconstructed reverently by people who have an intense God-experience and a deep insight into the inter-relatedness of all humans and

all that exist, creeds may lead one to that original experience which is symbolized and articulated by the creeds. The same creed for which one is prepared to give one's entire life (*credo* is said to have derived from *cor-dare* which means 'to give heart') opens up the possibility of expanding the horizon of one's own heart and mind which lets everything and everyone be embraced without exclusion or inclusion and lets everything exist in its uniqueness and inter-relatedness. This is the grace of an insight and a liberating experience.

The Nicene-Constantinople creed expresses the foundational God-experience of the Christian community in and through Jesus Christ. Though the faith-formulations used Greek categories of thought and expressions this creed tried to summarize, preserve, confess and proclaim the content of faith 'handed over' by the apostolic community. What the Fathers of the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople I articulated in abstract Greek philosophical categories, in an archaic language and in the world-views of their times was the living tradition of the community regarding the identity of Jesus Christ, the revelation of the Triune God in Jesus Christ, the origin and destiny of humans and their world, God's intervention in human history for the wholeness of humans and the entire creation and the God-willed community of the Church. Does this creed while preserving the foundational Christian experience of Jesus Christ prevent a deeper and wider understanding of Jesus Christ? Are the members of the Church, committed to the person of Jesus Christ and his mission and the truths expressed in the creed, bound also to accept the world-views, the philosophical categories that were used as means to express these truths of revelation? Would not a literal and fundamentalist reading of text of the creed prevent a dynamic and challenging vision of Jesus Christ in different socio-cultural and multi-religious contexts. The articles in this issue of *Jeevadhara* make an attempt to discuss these questions as well as the new challenges to the creedal formulations of our faith-experience in Jesus Christ in his Church.

This issue is dedicated to the late John Britto Chethimatam. An article written by Dr. Thomas Aykara will be our tribute to his revered memory.

Jacob Parappally

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Text: End and Beginning of Christologies

Jose Mario C. Francisco

In his article Jose Mario C. Francisco affirms the importance of Nicene-Constantinople creed as it resolved the prevalent controversies of the time that tried to undermine the orthodox faith. But the articulation of the Christian faith in the creed to avoid any doctrinal error does not mean that the language in which it is formulated explains or grasps the reality toward which it points. Therefore, the creeds have also a symbolic function. Hence, the Christology of the creeds and the councils is both the end and the beginning of Christology. On the one hand they set boundaries of a Christology and on the other hand they open up possibilities of relevant Christologies.

In his essay "Current Problems in Christology", Karl Rahner describes any doctrinal formula as both end and beginning: "while this formula is an end, an acquisition and a victory, which allows us to enjoy clarity and security as well as ease in instruction, if this victory is to be a true one, the end must also be a beginning."¹ This brief essay discusses in what sense the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Text (NCT) has both been for subsequent, especially contemporary, Christologies. More specifically, it seeks to describe the dynamic propelling the emergence of new Christologies and, in the light of this dynamic, the status of the NCT as horizon.

1 Karl Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology" in *Theological Investigations*, Volume I, trans. by Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1965), 149.

The NCT sets an end for Christian churches in so far as it serves as an authoritative and normative statement of the Christian Faith. Thus all subsequent Christologies, whether in magisterial documents or theological work, cannot simply dismiss or ignore this text. All are bound to the truth of the Christian Faith that the NCT expresses.

But the very process by which this truth is discovered and appropriated also marks the NCT as the beginning of subsequent Christologies: "The clearest formulations, the most sanctified formulas, the classic condensations of the centuries-long work of the Church in prayer, reflection and struggle concerning God's mysteries: all these derive their life from the fact that they are not end but beginning, not goal but means, truths which open the way to the—ever greater—Truth."²

Neither abandonment nor substitution of the formula itself, this "preserves its significance, it remains precisely living, by being expounded."³ In the concrete, this process entails the recognition of the formula as an historical document and as a confession of Christian Faith. To discover the meaning and significance of the text then calls for a refusal to reduce its revelatory power into the mere proposition that "Jesus Christ is *homoousion* with the Father" and to repeat this proposition as self-evident.

Current studies on 4th century texts and views of patristic writers in general and on the NCT in particular show the historical complexity attending the formulation of the text itself. Since this process occurred at the core of a widespread and heated controversy and since its resulting formulation was intended as an answer to the divisive situation, it is imperative to recognize in the words of Eric Osborn, that "[such] conclusions are ambiguous without the argument which leads to them."⁴ Moreover, John Behr adds that "an answer cannot stand alone, without being an answer to a specific question; the question

2 *Ibid.*, 149.

3 *Ibid.*, 150.

4 Quoted in John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea, The Formation of Christian Theology Volume 1* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Theological Seminary Press, 1999), 6.

provides the context within which the answer has its meaning.”⁵ Thus many of these recent studies focus on both the wider social and political contexts as well as the strictly theological issues at stake.

What emerges from these historical studies is the inadequacy of traditional labels for opposing sides of the theological controversy. Joseph Leinhard considers the usual pairs of categories inadequate—“Arian” and “Nicene” being anachronistic and perhaps too dogmatic, while “Antiochene” and “Alexandrian” misleading.⁶ He “suggest[s] calling the two conflicting theological systems “mihypostatic” and “dyhypostatic” theology, the theology of one hypostaseis and of two hypostaseis respectively.”⁷

Moreover, Leinhard even hesitates to offer a uniform translation of *ousia* and *hypostasis* since “fourth-century authors themselves were wary of explaining the meaning of the two words, and generally resorted to comparisons rather than definitions.”⁸ Joseph T. Leinhard, “Ousia and Hypostasis : The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of ‘One Hypostasis’ in The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity, ed. by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102-3.

It is evident that “the Council of Nicaea, in its anti-Arian anathemas, used the words *ousia* and *hypostasis* as parallel (but not, therefore, necessarily as synonyms),”⁹ and that “for more than thirty years after Nicaea, the attention of theologians and controversialists was not centered on the word *homoousion*, or any other technical term.”¹⁰

5 *Ibid.*, 6.

6 Joseph T. Lienhard, “The ‘Arian’ Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered,” *Theological Studies*, Vol. 48 (1987), pp. 415-37. 416

7 *Ibid.*, p. 422.

8 Joseph T. Leinhard, “*Ousia* and *Hypostasis*: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of ‘One *Hypostasis*’ in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102-3.

9 *Ibid.*, 103.

10 *Ibid.*, 104.

Similarly, the standard 'Cappadocian settlement' in terms of one *ousia* in three *hypostaseis* is "more a piece of academic shorthand than a quotation from the writings of the Cappadocians."¹¹ It is similarly assumed "that the Council of Constantinople of AD 381 canonized the formula," when "it is not found in the creed of that council."¹²

These examples are cited as indicative of the complex historical process surrounding the formulation of the NCT, inasmuch as "the crisis of 318 was part of a larger movement: a movement from the rule of faith to theology, from the language of confession to the language of reflection, from belief to speculation on what was believed."¹³ Thus the discovery of its historical meaning, that is, what is intended by the text, is always ongoing and its results ever open to revision.

But being more than an historical document, the NCT is also a confession of Christian Faith then and now. And since this Faith is integral, both in terms of God's revelation and the human response to this revelation, then its kerygmatic and soteriological nature must be recognized within the living Tradition of the Church. And since this living Tradition proclaims and receives God's revelation, the meaning and significance of the NCT cannot be reduced to the results of historical inquiry or the status of a proposition.

As confession of Christian Faith then, the NCT is a creed rooted in the Word of God in Scriptures and promising salvation in Christ in the context of the 4th century. Thus it must be seen not only in relation to then current theological views but to the total life of the Church, its worship, spirituality and practice. While involving an historical perspective not limited to technical history, this entails a synthetic and therefore imaginative grasp of how the meaning and significance of the NCT are integrally expressed in ecclesial life then. In particular, this is accomplished, as Behr points out, through the process of reflection on the Word of God in Christ and the Scriptures, since "the theological positions and formulae encountered here were largely developed within a scriptural matrix."¹⁴ Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 420.

11 *Ibid.*, 99.

12 *Ibid.*, 100.

13 Leinhard, "The 'Arian' Controversy," p. 420.

14 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 420.

Similarly, as confession of Christian Faith now, the NCT remains a creed and must be read in the context of the total life of the Church today: "This task was initiated by the apostles and evangelists, thus establishing the tradition of such reflection once for all, but it still requires the engagement of all who would respond to the challenge."¹⁵ Its meaning and significance must therefore be seen in relation to contemporary ecclesial worship, spirituality and practice.

Here it is important to remember that the Church's living Tradition in terms of its proclamation and reception of God's revelation provides the foundation of its unity and identity. In Vincent Brümmer's formulation, this unity and identity "can be found in the narrative continuity of the historical process of interpretation which starts in the Bible itself and refers to the connected series of events telling of the impact of Jesus Christ, who is acknowledged by believers to be the fixed origin of the tradition as well as the original locus of meaning for human existence."¹⁶ In order to be proclaimed and received as good news for all, Christianity "constantly require[s] translation, reconceptualization and re-interpretation in order to maintain [its] relevance and adequacy, as well as [its] intelligibility and credibility."¹⁷

Moreover, this process through which the Church proclaims and receives God's saving Word, this "Christian conversation throughout its history is embedded in the broader religious conversation about the meaning of human existence in which many others besides Christians alone are involved."¹⁸ On such basis, Bishop Bengt Sundkler of Africa writes: "A theologian who with the Apostle is prepared to become to the Jews a Jew, to them that are without law, as without law, and *therefore* unto Africans as an African, must needs start with the fundamental facts of the African interpretation of existence and the

15 *Ibid.*, 1.

16 Vincent Brümmer, "The Identity of the Christian Tradition" in *Identity and Change in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Marcel Sarot and Gijsbert van der Brink (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 41.

17 *Ibid.*, 24.

18 *Ibid.*, 38.

universe.”¹⁹ One could also point to as other examples how the contemporary Church’s valuation of social justice and liberation or the feminist Christologies have contributed to a deepened understanding of Jesus Christ as Savior.

Given the above description of the dynamics involved in the NCT as end and beginning of Christologies, one needs to ask how the NCT itself can be construed. Borrowing from Sarah Coakley’s insightful and careful analysis of how contemporary theologians have construed the Chalcedonian ‘Definition’²⁰ Sarah Coakley, “What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian ‘Definition’” in

The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God, ed. by Stephen T. Davies, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143-63, the following discussion focuses on the issue of whether the NCT is better characterized as literal rendition or symbolic/metaphorical expression. This issue which parallels discussions about the literal sense of Scripture lies at the heart of contemporary Christologies many of which argue in favor of construing a doctrinal formulation as symbolic or metaphorical expression rather than literal rendition.

As with the meaning of Scripture, this rejection is valid if construing a doctrinal formulations as ‘literal’ implied the following: (a) its meaning is self-evident and requires little or no historical study (a position analogous to that of biblical fundamentalism) or (b) it expresses all of what God has revealed, that is, the formula marks the end, even an absolute one, of all reflection. This rejection is further reinforced by what W. Alston points out as ‘adventitious associations’ of the word

19 Quoted in *Ibid.*, 27.

20 Sarah Coakley, “What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian ‘Definition’” in *The Incarnation. An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*. ed. by Stephen T. Davies, Daniel Kendall, SJ and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143-63.

‘literal’: ‘precise’, ‘univocal’, ‘specific’, ‘factual’, ‘empirical’ and ‘ordinary’.²¹

The related preference for a ‘symbolic’ or ‘metaphorical’ construal is rightly intended to avoid the above implications and associations and solidly based on earlier discussions of religious and theological language. However, some of those who choose this construal like Richard Norris or John Hick assume that this implies “a recession from reality” or “that to use ‘metaphorical’ speech is to say something with *less* firm ontological commitment than if one spoke literally.”²² In contrast to this, “the primary and obvious meaning of the term ‘literal’ is that when I speak thus I mean what I say to be true.”²³ Moreover, she adds that “the coinage of new and striking metaphor (‘speaking of one thing in terms suggestive of another’) has more often sprung in Christian tradition from a realistic commitment, especially amongst mystical theologians...”²⁴ What is thus needed in this use of ‘symbolic’ or ‘metaphorical’ vis-à-vis doctrinal formulations is charting a path from the symbolic or metaphorical to the ontological, whatever form this ontology is.

In the light of this discussion, Coakley suggests an alternative construal of the Chalcedonian ‘Definition’ as horizon (*horos*). Far from intending to provide a full systematic account of Christology, and even less a complete and precise metaphysics of Christ’s makeup, “it sets a ‘boundary’ on what can, and cannot, be said...”²⁵ From this perspective, the NCT rules out an aberrant way of speaking about Christ (“There was a time when he was not”) and provides a nonbiblical word (*homoousion*) for stating the relation between Jesus Christ and the Father without intending a technical definition. One can thus say, lifting words from Coakley, that this recapitulates and assumes the acts of salvation narrated in the Scriptures and then leaves us at that

21 Sarah Coakley, 158.

22 *Ibid.*, 153-54.

23 *Ibid.*, 157.

24 Sarah Coakley, 154.

25 *Ibid.*, 161.

'boundary', understood as the place now to which those salvific acts must be brought to avoid doctrinal error, but without any supposition that this linguistic regulation thereby *explains* or *grasps* the reality toward which it points.²⁶

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26 Ibid., 161.

The Person and Mission of Jesus Christ according to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Dominic Veliath

Dominic Veliath discusses the creedal formulations of Nicaea and Constantinople and the Chalcedonian Christological formula in the light of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). According to the CCC on the basis of theological method and on purely hermeneutic grounds one cannot break off the bridges with Christian tradition which presents to us a Christology articulated in the Nicene-Constantinople creed. His contention is that with respect to the future, “new” Christological paradigms certainly present both problems and possibilities. The creedal formulas do not and cannot exhaust the possibility of articulating the Mystery of Christ and CCC demands ‘the adaptation of doctrinal presentations and catechetical methods required by the differences of culture, age, spiritual maturity and social and ecclesial condition among all those to whom it is addressed’.

1. Elements of Theological Method

The elaboration of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is theologically situated within what traditionally used to be called the *Preambles of the Faith* viz., that the human person is capable of knowing God (CCC, nn.27ff.). This knowledge (mediation) is, however, in its turn, situated by God’s transcendence; and consequently, there is the affirmation that our human words always fall short of the mystery of God (CCC, nn. 36ff.).

It is in this context that we confront God's Revelation – whereby “through an utterly free decision, God has revealed Himself and given Himself to man.” (CCC, n. 51). This Revelation reaches its climax and fullness in Jesus Christ (CCC, nn. 65 – 67) and is embodied in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, which is entrusted to the Church as a whole (CCC, nn. 74 – 84).

The Christian believer responds to this revelation in faith. The content of faith is one (CCC, n. 174). “We do not believe in formulas but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch. As a consequence, the believer's act [of faith] does not terminate in the propositions but in the realities [which they express]. All the same, we do approach these realities with the help of formulations of the faith which permit us to express the faith and hand it on, to celebrate in community, to assimilate it and live on it more and more” (CCC, n. 170).

The responsibility of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God has been entrusted in a special way to the Magisterium (CCC, nn. 85ff.), which has the authority to oblige the Christian people to an irrevocable adherence of faith in specific instances (CCC, n. 88). Nevertheless “it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith, and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love” (CCC, n. 158).

2. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The Apostolic Church expressed and handed on her faith in brief formulae normative for all. These are the creeds, the symbols of faith. “A symbol of faith is a summary of the principal truths of the faith” (CCC, n. 188). One such creed is the Nicene-Constantinople creed. It draws its great authority from the fact that it stems from the first two ecumenical councils. It remains common to all the Churches of both East and West (CCC, n. 195). In it, the truths of the faith are articulated in terms of their reference to the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

The presentation of the creed as it is found in the CCC, elaborates the doctrine of the Holy Trinity already in the course of Article I: I

believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth. The Father is revealed by the Son (CCC, nn. 238 – 242), and both Father and Son are revealed by the Holy Spirit (CCC, 243 – 248).

In this context, the dogma of the Holy Trinity is spelt out. “We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the ‘consubstantial Trinity’. The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves, but each of them is God whole and entire. Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature” (CCC, n. 253).

3. The Person and Mission of Jesus Christ

Already in the First Article of the creed, with respect to the Son it is stated: “The Incarnation of God’s Son reveals that God is the eternal Father and that the Son is consubstantial with the Father, which means that, in the Father and with the Father, the Son is one and the same God.” (CCC, n. 262).

The Person and Mission of Jesus Christ is dealt with primarily in Chapter Two: **I believe in Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God**, which is articulated in six articles. The perspective is basically dynamic and follows the trajectory of the saving events of Christ’s life, beginning with the event of the Incarnation – The Conception, the Mysteries of Christ’s Life: Infancy, Hidden Life, Public Life and Paschal Mystery.

God did not abandon human beings, but promised them a Messiah and a Redeemer. In fulfillment of that promise, “when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a a women, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Gal 4/4-5; CCC, n.422).

Though the Apostles’ Creed speaks only about the incarnation (conception and birth) and the Paschal mystery (passion, death, resurrection and ascension), the CCC points out that they shed light on the whole of the earthly life of Jesus; and hence it takes up also the infancy, the hidden life and the public life of Jesus for its consideration.

According to the CCC, there are three characteristics that are common to all the mysteries of Christ’s life:

- they reveal the Father and the Father's love;
- they are redemptive;
- they all aim at restoring sinful humanity .

4. The Death of Jesus

The CCC deliberately distances itself from any interpretation of the death of Christ which may smack of anti-semitism. It takes pains to show that the "religious authorities in Jerusalem were not unanimous about what stance to take towards Jesus (CCC, n. 596); furthermore, there were at least a significant number among them, who believed in him, though imperfectly (CCC, n. 595); and the responsibility for the trial and death of Jesus cannot be laid on the Jews in Jerusalem as a whole, and much less on the Jews as such (CCC, n. 597). Quoting *Nostra Aetate*, it states that "neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with crimes committed during his Passion" (NA, 598).

On the other hand, Christ's death was not merely the result of chance, but part of the mystery of God's plan for the world (CCC, n. 599). His death is "both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemptions of men, and the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the blood of the covenant which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (CCC, n. 613).

5. The Resurrection of Christ

The resurrection of Christ can be said to be historical inasmuch as it could be verified by the reality of the empty tomb and the apparitions of Christ to his disciples; however, it also "transcends and surpasses history" (CCC, n. 647) "insofar as it is the entry of Christ's humanity into the glory of God" (CCC, n. 656). The Risen Body of Christ, imbued with the Spirit is free from all limitations imposed by space and time (CCC, nn. 645 – 646).

The resurrection of Christ, which is the work of the Trinity (CCC, nn. 648 – 650), has the following significance (Cf. CCC, nn. 651 – 655):

- it vindicates the claims made by Jesus during his life and authenticates his work and teachings;
- it fulfills the promises both of the Old Testament and of Jesus himself during his life;
- it confirms the truth of the divinity of Jesus;
- it opens for us the way to a new life;
- Christ thereby becomes the principle and source of our own resurrection.

6. The Significance of the Christ Event

Among the different dimensions of this Saving Event, there is in the first place, the **soteriological** dimension. The Son of God became incarnate “For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven” (CCC, n. 456).

- In order to save us by reconciling us with God (CCC, n. 457);
- So that we might know God’s love (CCC, n. 458) ;
- To be our model of holiness (CCC, n. 459);
- To make us partakers of the divine nature (CCC, n. 460).

There is also what can be called the **ontological** dimension to this Saving Mystery

Jesus Christ is true God. This was confessed in the Council of Nicaea (325) against Arius, when it declared in its creed that the Son of God “is begotten not made, of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father (CCC, n. 465).

Jesus Christ is true man. This was confessed against Gnostic Docetism and Apollinaris of Laodicea and the Monophysites (CCC, nn. 464, 467, 471).

There is a unity underlying the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. This was confessed against the Nestorian heresy (CCC, n. 466).

Finally the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon (451) formally defined the following:

“Following the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach and confess

one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, composed of rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial with us as to his humanity; "like us in all things but sin". He was begotten from the Father before all ages as to his divinity and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, was born as to his humanity of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord and only-begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they come together in one person (*prosopon*) and one *hypostasis*.

7. Some Comments

The opinion of Adolf Harnack cannot be accepted when he states that, by this Christological definition of Chalcedon, the Church of the East was "robbed of its faith"; and that the four qualifications (without confusion, change, division or separation.) are to the classical Greek theologian highly "irreligious."¹

Each generation of Christians has contributed something towards the appropriation of the *Mysterium Christi*. The observations of Aloys Grillmeier are pertinent in this instance. He remarks that to allow only those questions that are live issues for the present to determine the interpretation of the *Mysterium Christi* would be a dangerous limitation of our understanding of Christ. But at the same time, the problems of our day are of the utmost value in the understanding of history. They teach us that we must show how a consideration of the past is relevant to the present. As far as Chalcedon is concerned: "The confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the *novum* of the Christian faith, demanded of Christian theology a twofold demonstration, first, that it was compatible with Jewish monotheism and secondly that it was different from polytheism. The solution of

1 See in this regard, Adolf HARNACK, *Dogmengeschichte*, 2 Tübingen 1931.

this problem depended on the possibility of combining in God a true unity with a true distinction".²

As far as theological methodology is concerned, even if abstract concepts find their way into theological method, the method itself consists in "listening to" the proven witnesses of the Christian faith. The formulas are articulated, but in the context of an already formed tradition. It is not irrelevant to the issue that the definition itself points to the prophets and the sayings of Christ, and finally to the creed of the Fathers. Hence the formal and abstract concepts of the definition need to be supplemented by Sacred Scripture.³

It cannot be denied that in this elaboration, the emphasis was laid chiefly on the identity of Christ rather than on his salvific activity on our behalf. Nevertheless, the CCC pays attention to the definition's soteriological implications. In the first place, the Chalcedonian definition may have a static quality, but it provides a basis for the salvation history dimension which has characterized biblical Christology. Furthermore, the heterodoxical explanations did not have merely ontological bases, but there were also different soteriological emphases involved.

Terms like *homoousios*, *hypostasis*, *physis* and *prosopon* found their way into the dogmatic formulas, not with an exact technical meaning, but with a content taken from a theological language which had long been making use of these terms. But they do not assign philosophically fixed meanings to the terms; they intend rather to express the reality of Christ's being. The Fathers mean to say that while there is a real distinction between the natures of Godhead and manhood, these two natures of Christ, however, are united in one divine person or *hypostasis*. Concisely, this dogma clarifies one decisive point of belief in Christ, viz. that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God really entered into human history and achieved our salvation.

8. Concluding Remarks

The articulation of the Christian understanding of the Person and

2 Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition. From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon*, Trans by J.S.BOWDEN, (London). 1965, 125.

3 See in this regard, Aloys GRILLMEIER, 486.

Mission of Jesus Christ in the CCC, seems to highlight the fact that the definition of Chalcedon is a milestone in the Church's *intellectus fidei*, and in that sense, to quote Rahner, "not [only] an end, but also a beginning".

To quote Rahner once again: "It is obvious that a revealed truth remains what it is, remains precisely "true", i.e. it corresponds to reality and is always binding. Yet all human statements, even those in which faith expresses God's saving truths are finite. By this we mean that they never declare the *whole* of a reality... They are an *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, in so far as they state absolutely nothing which is false... But because our statements about divine realities are finite and hence in this sense inadequate – that is, while actually corresponding to reality, yet not simply congruent with it – so every formula in which the faith is expressed can in principle be surpassed while still retaining its truth. That is to say, in principle at least it can be replaced by another which states the same thing and what is more, states it not only without excluding more extensive, more delicately nuanced prospects, but positively opening them up: prospects on to facts, realities, truths, which had not been seen explicitly in the earlier formulation and which make it possible to see the same reality from a new point of view, in a fresh perspective."⁴

The decisive feature of such a change is that it is a change in, not of identity. The Church has a "memory". They change while they preserve, they become new without losing anything of the old. If we fail either to preserve or to change, we should betray the truth, either by falling into error or by failing to make the truth our own in a really existential way.⁵

With respect to the future, "new" Christological paradigms certainly present both problems and possibilities. Often what are involved are issues of pre-comprehension, perspective, method and hermeneutics. Nevertheless it is clear according to the CCC, that on the basis of the theological method, one cannot on purely hermeneutic grounds break

4 See Karl RAHNER, The Development of Dogma, in Theological Investigations I, 43 – 44.

5 Cf. *ibid.*, 45

off the bridges with Christian tradition and write off entire periods of the Church's tradition of the past; one such period would be that which is articulated in the Christological section of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed.

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the approach to the mystery of Christ is predominantly doctrinal or dogmatic rather than experiential or personal.⁶ However, one needs to remember that the CCC is a "comprehensive information book about Catholic faith and an organic exposition of doctrine, but not an encyclopaedia of Catholic teaching;⁷ it has to be kept in mind, as John Henry Newman pointed out, that "Christianity is faith, faith implies a doctrine, a doctrine implies propositions."⁸

As Thomas Kalathuveetil observes:⁹ "In the CCC, one can find

- A genuine, integral and systematic exposition of the Catholic faith. Genuine in its sense, integral in quantity and systematic in its connections;
- A faith that is known objectively;
- A text of the Catholic Church that is "official" – a qualified and an authoritative tool for mediating the Church's self-knowledge;
- A text that tries to present faith positively and serenely but nor argumentatively or apologetically.

On the other hand, it is not the intention of the CCC, "to provide the adaptation of doctrinal presentations and catechetical methods

6 Cf. Jose KUTTIANIMATTATHIL, "Our Faith in Jesus Christ", in Cyril de SOUZA & Thomas KALATHUVEETIL (eds.), *Introducing the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1994), 66.

7 Cf. Thomas KALATHUVEETIL, "Characteristics and Urgency for the Catechism of the Catholic Church" in *Introducing the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2.

8 "John Henry NEWMAN, quoted in Christoph SCHÖNBORN, "Major Themes and Underlying Principles of the Catechism of the Catholic Church", in *The Living Light* 30(Fall 1993)1. 63.

9 Cf. "Characteristics and Urgency for the Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2.

required by the differences of culture, age, spiritual maturity and social and ecclesial condition among all those to whom it is addressed. Such indispensable adaptations are the responsibility of particular catechisms and, even more, of those who instruct the faithful." (CCC, 24).

This is a challenging task that remains yet to be done, with respect to the Catechism as a whole, and specifically with respect to the implications of the Church's understanding of the mystery of Christ with reference to the Indian context.

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A Catholic Theology of Religions Faithful to the Christology of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds

Paul F. Knitter

Paul F. Knitter discusses the Nicene-Constantinople creed in the context of our need to evolve a Catholic theology of religions. He insists that we must *interpret* the creedal texts of Nicaea and Constantinople. This would mean, according to Knitter, that we recognize and treat the conciliar language as religious language, language dealing with the *Mysterium* of the Divine; that means: analogical or symbolic language. The creed "is telling us something very true, but it is doing so not by definition but by indication; it tells us the truth, but only through a glass darkly." If we interpret the creedal texts in our contexts it would help us to develop a pneumatological Christology that follows the lead of the Spirit, and a dialogical Christology, one that is both kenotic and prophetic. The creedal texts, instead of limiting the scope of our vision of Jesus Christ, open up new and challenging horizons for our understanding and commitment to him and his mission.

In our efforts to reach a consensus on a Catholic theology of religions, we wish to be faithful to the "Catholic faith concerning the identity and mission of Jesus Christ," especially as that has been formulated in the Councils of Nicaea I and Constantinople I. But to be faithful to the past, we must be faithful to the present. To hold firm to the *traditum*, we must render it into *traditio*. Therefore, we need the "signs of the times" in order to understand and faithfully live the "signs of the past". To understand the past, we must look at it from the present. Otherwise we cannot understand the past. – (This brief

description of theological method would be endorsed by the majority of my colleagues in the Catholic Theological Society of America. I'm not saying anything revolutionary.)

The Witness of Nicaea I and Constantinople I

To be faithful to the past is to take it seriously, to respect it, to be "ruled" by it (the *regula fidei*). But that means, we must not take it too facilely, or too immediately – as if, in Bernard Lonergan's terms, "understanding" were simply a matter of "looking" or "reading". We must, in other words, *interpret* the creedal texts of Nicaea and Constantinople. And this means we must recognize and treat the conciliar language as religious language, language dealing with the *Mysterium of the Divine*; that means: analogical or symbolic language. All religious language, not just biblical or pastoral language, is, and can only be, symbolic. It is telling us something very true, but it is doing so not by definition but by indication: it tells us the truth, but only through a glass darkly. In Buddhist imagery, all our religious languages are fingers that point to the moon, but they are never the moon itself. We are using symbols not only when we speak of "Father, Son, Spirit," but also when we talk of "substantia, homœousios, unigenitus"¹.

In this regard, we would do well to take seriously the reminders of the Cappadocian Fathers – Basil and the two Gregorys – that we must be humble about what we think we know of God: "...the Cappadocians clearly recognized that all language about God could only be an *analogy*, not a literal description of what God really was. God in his own nature, they insisted, was unknowable; we know him only from his effects recorded in the Bible and seen in the world. In the same way, we cannot 'see' the wind, but we can see its effects on the trees"².

1 One might then ask what is the difference between the language that speaks of "Spirit" and the language that speaks of "homœousios". They are different, indeed. One is confessional or poetic language; the other is theological or philosophical language. But insofar as such language deals with the Mystery of the Divine, it is and remains symbolic— confessional language uses symbols that appeal to the heart; theological language uses symbols that appeal to the head.

2 The Christian Tradition 136.

This last image – knowing the wind by seeing not it but its effects – suggests a basic hermeneutical guideline for interpreting the language of the councils: we understand the meaning of the words in their effects on us. We can grasp what the words meant then and what they might mean today by exploring how these words were intended to express or preserve the experience of being saved through Jesus Christ, of finding God in and through and as this Jesus of Nazareth. The ontological content of the words is found in their soteriological potency or significance. We know what they mean when we feel what they say. Fidelity to the conciliar statements therefore is not verbal; it is soteriological. Our new language about Jesus is faithful to the normative old language insofar as it passes on the experience of finding God in Jesus and being transformed by that experience.

The Abiding Normative Assertions of Nicaea I and Constantinople I

So, recognizing that the language of these two Councils is religious and therefore symbolic, and that we grasp its ontological content through its soteriological intent, we can ask: what are the abiding, normative Christological assertions of Nicaea and Constantinople that we must hold to in our efforts to understand Jesus Christ in our religiously plural world? Summarizing, I offer five such assertions:

1. *To know Jesus is to know God.* This I believe is the soteriological claim of *homoousios* or *substantia*.

2. *There is more of God than the God we meet in Jesus.* This is implied in the clear assertion that the Word incarnate in Jesus is not the Father nor the Spirit.

3. *Jesus saves all people.* This, the soteriological content of “*propter nostram salute*”.

4. *There is no other like Jesus.* I believe this is saving reminder delivered in the words “*unigenitus*”³.

3 I say this even though “The phrase or term ‘only-begotten’ is of no real special import, ‘because it was accepted by all parties in the Arian quarrel and no special dogmatic significance was read into it.’” Kelly, *Creeds*, 235

5. *The Holy Spirit also saves.* Although this was not the explicit intent of the adjective “vivificans”, this is what it means. So in our ongoing efforts to understand and follow Jesus the Christ, how can we be faithful to these assertions and this language of the Councils and at the same time be faithful to the signs of our religiously plural times? I suggest that we need, firstly, a pneumatological Christology, one that follows the lead of the Spirit, and secondly, a dialogical Christology, one that is both kenotic and prophetic.

A Pneumatological Christology

In surveying the present *status quaestionis* of a Christian theology of religions, I see a growing number of theologians taking up the advice that Karl Rahner offered back in the 80's – to make “pneumatology ...the fundamental point of departure for its entire theology [of religions] and then attempt from this point ... to gain a real and radical understanding of Christology”⁴. Back then, Rahner already felt what today is being called “the Christological impasse” in working out a theology of religions. In the words of Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong, “The Christian dialogue with other religious traditions has stalled at the christological impasse on more than one occasion...”⁵ It's the uniqueness question – or what then Cardinal Ratzinger called “the unicity of Christ” — that keeps tripping up theologians or getting them into trouble. So pneumatology – which Rahner described in the

4 “Aspects of European Theology,” in *Theological Investigations* Vol. XXI (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 97-98 [78-98]. Among those who are following Rahner's advice: Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Michael Amaladoss, “Listen to the Spirit: ‘The Father is Greater than I’ (John 14.28)”, *Vidyajyoti* 63 (1999) 687-89; Michael Ipgrave, *Trinity and Inter-Faith Dialogue: Plenitude and Plurality* (“Religions and Discourse” Series, James M.M. Francis, ed., Vol. 14) (New York: Peter Lang, 2003). Peter Hodgson, “The Spirit and Religious Pluralism,” in *The Myth of Religious Superiority* (See Note 6), 135-49. Paul F. Knitter, “A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions,” *Current Dialogue*, Jan. 1991, pp. 32-41.

5 Yong, *Discerning*, 60, see also 25, 226, 288.

passage just cited as “a teaching of the inmost, divinizing gift of grace for all human beings”⁶ – might be a way around the impasse.

But as Yong and others point out, it will be such a helpful route only if we take seriously an ingredient of our traditional Trinitarian theology that can be epitomized in the patristic image of “the two hands of the Father”. Viewed *ad intra*, there are two really different processions within the Trinitarian life of God. *Ad extra*, there are two truly different, but always related, movements or missions by which the infinite parental Source of life reaches into the world to embrace and save it. One, Christians have found incarnated intimately in the person of Jesus the Christ. The other is the brooding Spirit of God who has hovered over and inspired creation from its very inception. So “...while the person of Jesus Christ is a historical symbol of God’s reality in the world, the Holy Spirit is par excellence the symbol of the divine presence and activity in the cosmic realm”⁷.

The problem with many of the recent efforts to fashion a pneumatological or Trinitarian theology of religions is – allow me to put it this way – that they end up tinged with the heresy of subordinationism. After speaking eloquently and profusely of the revealing, saving presence of the Spirit in the religious world, theologians like Gavin D’Costa end up insisting that whatever is disclosed by the Spirit must be “measured and discerned by their conformity to and in their illumination of Christ ... Jesus is the normative criterion of God”⁸ Jacques Dupuis was more explicit: “Christ, not the Spirit, is at the center as the way to God”⁹ I believe the conclusion of Amos Yong is hard to refute: Such “...failure to differentiate between the two economies inevitably risks the

6 Rahner, Loc. Cit.

7 Yong, *Discerning*, 29.

8 D’Costa. “Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Pluralism,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Gavin D’Costa, ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 23. See also, D’Costa, *The Meeting*, 114.

9 Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 197.

subordination of the mission of the Spirit to that of the Son, and ultimately to an ecclesiological definition of soteriology"¹⁰. More forcefully, he speaks of a "denigration" or a "domination" of the Spirit by the Son.¹¹

So I do want to affirm a pneumatological route around the Christological impasse.¹² But it must be a pneumatology that is soundly and consistently Trinitarian – one that recognizes the difference between the Trinitarian persons, processions, and missions. This means that what the Spirit is up to in other religions may be truly and perhaps surprisingly different from what has been revealed in the Incarnate Word. God's revelation through the Spirit in the religions cannot be reduced to what God has revealed in Jesus. Michael Amaladoss therefore offers this advice: "The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. But she does not just repeat what Jesus has done in the Christian community. Otherwise, the other religions would not be different. Perhaps, together with the phrase, 'the Father is greater than I', we must take another phrase, 'The Spirit is not I', though we may not find it in this form in the Bible."¹³

But what is truly different in the Spirit's activity in other religions will always be intimately related to the Incarnate Word's revelation in Jesus. The Spirit may be saying something new, something beyond the Good News of Jesus, but it will connect with the Good News, so that between the two very different revelations, as between the two very different Persons of the Trinity, there will be an exciting, life-giving *perichoresis* – a dancing together and a transformative acting together. I believe that a synonym for such *perichoresis* is dialogue.

10 Discerning, 64

11 Ibid. 319, 320.

12 And here we are following the lead to John Paul II, whose "singular contribution ... to a theology of religions," according to Jacques Dupuis was his insistence on taking seriously "the operative present of the Spirit of God in the religious life of non-Christians...." Toward, 171

13 "Listen to the Spirit" (see Note 4), 687-89.

A Dialogical Christology Based on the Kenotic Christ

But Rahner suggested, as we heard, that after the Spirit helps us around the impasse of Christology, she can also backtrack a bit and assist us “to gain a real and radical understanding of Christology”. – I believe that this is exactly what is happening within Christian theology today. In an effort to carry on the ongoing task of Christology in relation to religious pluralism, or more precisely, in an effort to link Christology to a pneumatological theology of religions, theologians are reinterpreting, renewing, revising their understanding of Christ; they are coming to new ways of appreciating the uniqueness or unicity of Christ as savior and Son of God. Such efforts, I believe, can be summarized and described under one heading: we’re moving toward a more *dialogical Christology*. Such a Christology provides another roadmap for exploring the other side of the Vatican II bridge.

For me, the most incisive and inspiring way to get at the content and intent of a dialogical Christology is John B. Cobb, Jr.’s simple witness of faith: “Christ is the Way that is open to other ways.”¹⁴ We cannot follow Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life unless we are also learning about other ways, exploring other truths, entering other lives. Christian discipleship is essentially, imperatively, *dialogical*. Relationships with others – with those who have other views and follow other paths — is essential not just to faithfully follow Christ and his message but to *understand* Christ and his message. As Michael Barnes puts it: “It is impossible to be Christian ‘without the others’...Christian living ... depends not on occupying a ‘place’ alongside others, but on practicing faith face to face with others, ...by constantly departing for another place....to be Christian is to exist in relationship....”¹⁵

Such a dialogical Christology is being developed and deepened from a variety of perspectives:

14 John B. Cobb, Jr., “Beyond Pluralism,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (See Note 8), 91.

15 Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 221-22, 230.

§ Following a more Trinitarian approach, theologians like Amos Yong and Michael Ipgrave, and to a lesser extent S. Mark Heim, stress that just as there is a diversity of relationships within the very Godhead, so there is a diversity of relationships between the Divine and humans, and that means a diversity of relationships *among* the religions. Or more particularly, just as the Word cannot be what it is and realize its identity without a constitutive relationship with the Spirit, so too must Christians who are trying to understand this Word in Christ be in a constitutive relationship with what the Spirit is revealing in other communities. As stated earlier, the *perichoresis* of Word and Spirit is danced out historically in the dialogue of Christians and other believers.¹⁶

§ One of the most coherent and engaging efforts to work out a dialogical Christology is through the symbol of *kenosis*. David H. Jensen does this in his *In the Company of Others: A Dialogical Christology*. Unpacking the Pauline insistence that Jesus' divinity and his role as savior is tied, tightly but mysteriously, to the act of emptying and letting go of himself in his love for and reaching out to others, Jensen arrives at an image of Jesus and discipleship that is essentially dialogical. In Jensen's own words:

Jesus Christ is the *One who embodies openness to others*...He is the One who goes *ahead* of all who would enclose him, manifesting himself throughout time whenever openness to others is embodied in love.

[Therefore:] 'Christomonism'—the proclamation of Jesus Christ at the expense of everything else—is a distortion of the life of discipleship and not its faithful execution. Indeed, conformity to Christ involves being claimed by others, and not claiming others as our own....In order to become more faithful disciples, Christians need the insights of persons who profess distinctly different religious commitments.¹⁷

16 For Yong, Ipgrave, see Note 4. S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans, 2001).

17 David H. Jensen, *In the Company of Others: A Dialogical Christology* (Cleve-

§ Another formulation of a Christology that calls for dialogue with others is via the non-dual dynamic of particularity and universality. If we Christians rightly affirm the scandal of particularity, we must also remind ourselves that it is a paradoxical scandal. The particular is a sacrament of the universal. In his particularity, Jesus calls us beyond his own identity to open ourselves to the universal divine reality that beckons us through diversity. Douglas John Hall puts it this way: "...what is so fascinating about the 'necessary', if 'scandalous'. *particular* named Jesus is that, being person, he puts us in touch with a *universal* God, who as living Person transcends our ideas and images of the divine *in the very act of coming close to us* ... Contrary to later (and usually heretical) Christologies, Jesus as he is depicted in the Gospels and epistles of the newer Testament, does not wish to be considered (as it were) all the God of God there is." And on the basis of such theological analysis, Hall makes a personal confession of faith that epitomizes a dialogical Christology: "I can say without any doubt at all that I am far more open to Jews and Muslims and Sikhs and humanists and all kinds of other human beings, including self-declared atheists, *because* of Jesus than I should ever have been *apart* from him."¹⁸

§ Finally, I believe that one of the most solid – certainly one of the most discussed – foundations for a dialogical Christology is being laid by what is called *comparative theology*, as that theology is being formulated by people like Frank Clooney, S.J., James Fredericks, Catherine Cornille. In their various ways, all of them insist that Christian theology not only can be, but must be, done *comparatively* – only through the study of other traditions can we adequately study our own. The so-called sources of theology must be expanded; "scripture and tradition" will mean *primarily* the bible and church history, but they must also include the sacred texts and beliefs of other traditions. As far as I know, none of these comparative theologians have explicitly laid out the implicit Christological

land: Pilgrim Press, 2001), xi-xv, passim.

18 Douglas John Hall, *Why Christian? For Those on the Edge of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 33-34.

foundations for such a comparative theology. Frank Clooney recognizes such foundations: “A person who is, or by God’s grace seeks to be, entirely committed to Christ, is also a person willing to take other religious traditions seriously, listening with a critical but deeply open mind to what people in that tradition have said.”¹⁹

A Dialogical Christology Based on the Prophetic Christ

If a dialogical Christology truly guides our explorations of the pluralistic terrain on the other side of the Vatican II bridge, it will also be a means of preserving what many – including our new Pope – fear can so easily be lost: the uniqueness of Jesus the Christ. What I’m getting at has to do with the nature of dialogue. If Jesus is the Way that is open to other Ways, if that openness is truly dialogical, then the relationship with others is not just a matter of listening and learning; it also must include speaking and challenging. And this brings us to the question of what it is that we Christians can and must bring to the conversation; what is our distinctive, Christian contribution?

That’s another version of the ever-recurring, never-finally-to-be-answered question: “Who do you say I am?” It must be formulated and answered according to the signs of the times. And with many Christians today, when I survey the signs of our times, I see incredible human and environmental suffering due to incredible human exploitation and injustice. In such a world, Christian witness must include what we know was distinctive of the identity and the message of Jesus: his particular (though certainly not exclusive) concern for the poor and the marginalized. Jesus did not just call for belief in God; he called for belief in the Reign of God – a new way of organizing society based on compassion, mutuality, and justice, especially for those who had been pushed aside. For Aloysius Pieris, today the most appropriate and effective way of speaking about Jesus’ uniqueness is to show how He “is the covenant between YHWH and the non-persons of the world...the irrevocable covenant between God and

19 Francis X. Clooney, “Implications for the Practice of Inter-Religious Learning,” in *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, Stephen J. Pope and Charles Hefling, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 168.

the poor.”²⁰ Therefore: “Our specifically Christian mission is to share the Crucified God’s solidarity or friendship with the poor, a friendship which led him to lay down his life for them (Jn. 15:13)”²¹.

A dialogical Christology, in other words, calls for a prophetic dialogue. This, I believe, is one of the most effective ways – in our present world – to preserve and proclaim the uniqueness of Christ. As followers of this Christ we announce that to know God, or to experience Enlightenment, or to submit to Truth may include many things, but it must also include not just loving our neighbor but doing justice and seeking reconciliation for the marginalized of the world. Other religious traditions may contain a similar concern; we will perhaps discover that in the dialogue. But what we *do* know is what we have seen in and learned from Jesus: that this concern for victims is integral to the experience of God or Truth. As Asian theologians and bishops are trying to make clear, it is by emphasizing or starting with this image of Jesus the prophet for the poor that we can best announce the Good News about our belief in Jesus as Savior or Son of God.²²

With a Christology that perichoretically dances with the Spirit presents in other religions and that kenotically listens to, and prophetically witness to, other religious communities – with such a Christology I believe we can render the *traditum* of the councils into a living *traditio* for the church and for the world.

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20 Aloysius Pieris, *Fire and Water : Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 150-51.

21 Aloysius Pieris, *God’s Reign for God’s Poor: A Return to the Jesus Formula* (Sri Lanka: Tulana Research Centre, 1998), Chapter 4.

22 Aloysius Pieris, “Christ beyond Dogma: Doing Christology in the Context of the Religions and the Poor,” *Louvain Studies* 25 (2000) 187-231. Felix Wilfred, “Images of Jesus Christ in the Asian Pastoral Context: An Interpretation of the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Concilium (1993/2), 51-62.

The Christological Assertions of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in relation to a Catholic Theology of Religions

Gavin D'Costa

Gavin D'Costa approaches the Christological assertions of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in relation to a catholic theology of religions from a different perspective than that of Knitter. He observes that 'while we confess the same creed, our ways of understanding it in regard to the theology of religions might generate fundamental disagreements about what precisely constitutes the truth of Christological dogmas'. For Gavin, the term 'revelation' must be reserved exclusively for God's revelation in Jesus Christ and God's self-communication as Father, Son and Holy Spirit as expressed by the creed. It may appear that such a position would create an impasse both in the Christological debate as well as in the process of evolving a mutually enriching dialogue with other religions. But he admits that the 'the practical significance of the action of the Word and Spirit can never be pre-determined in the sense that it requires Christians to be deeply attentive to the world religions if they are to be faithful to their Lord, for he is already beyond the boundaries of our camp.

Before proceeding to the title, two methodological comments are in order. First, we Catholic Christians are bound by the truth of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, although we are not bound by the thought world of the two Councils. Second, this truth requires critical explication and defence in every period of the church's history and is hermeneutically prior to 'truth' from other arenas of life, be this modern culture, other world religions, or science. This is not to assume a

hermetically sealed Christian message, a trans-historical conceptuality, or an incommensurable language game. Rather, it is to give the benefit of the doubt to the creedal truths of the Catholic faith in making sense of the world, while never knowing a priori where and how Catholic truth will converge, clash, or be irrelevant to these other claims. I suspect that we will not have a problem with the first claim, but will probably have differences over the second. I suspect this problem of *method* may be precisely where some of our real differences lie, such that while we confess the same creed, our ways of understanding it in regard to the theology of religions might generate fundamental disagreements about what precisely constitutes the truth of Christological dogmas.

From the Christological assertions of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed in relation to a Catholic theology of religions, I believe the following points are salient. I am sorry that I cannot defend them fully in so short an article, but I hope they will highlight some important issues.

First, if Jesus is consubstantial with the Father, truly Man and truly God, then we have in the incarnation a *sui generis* 'revelation', which Nicaea affirmed as Father, Son and Spirit. Here, primarily, God does not inspire, give a message, send a prophet, but uniquely becomes incarnate, God's self, revealing God's self. From this at least two possible implications are generated.

First, if this is the proper meaning of 'revelation', we have a rigorous test for the appropriate use of this word in the theology of religions debate. I would argue that 'revelation' should *not* be used in any manner other than that which signifies God's triune nature being disclosed by God through the incarnation. This is surely why in *Dei Verbum* the term 'revelation' is exclusively used only of the Old and New Testaments testifying to the incarnation, and trinity. *Nostra Aetate* does not use the technical term 'revelation' in relation to any other religion either. The term relates to the activity of the God-Man in the event of the incarnation. Revelation is not a generic term that is then applied to the incarnation, but operates the other way round subsequent to the event of the incarnation.

Second, and rather importantly, saying the above does not imply that God's action is absent from creation. The opposite is indeed true and in many varying degrees. However, there are Catholic theologians in this debate that argue that outside the incarnation, what we have in other religions is finally the result of the highest achievements of men and women, nothing to be scoffed at, but definitely no more than 'natural'.¹ This position assumes an unbridgeable gulf between nature and grace. In my opinion there are stronger arguments in its favour than its polar opposite, the pluralist position.² Nevertheless, *Redemptoris Missio* [RM], 28b partly clarifies this debate in two particular ways. It clearly indicates that the Word and Spirit *together, indissolubly*, may be present not only in hearts of non-Christians, but also in their religious structures. This is at odds with a picture painted of other religions as nature at its best, without the aid of grace. Secondly, it is also clearly at odds with the opposite conflation of nature and grace that is pluralism. It acknowledges the activity of God in the only terms available: trinitarian, Word and Spirit, but only as a 'preparation' for 'fulfilment' in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (RM, 29b, citing *Lumen Gentium* 16). So even when the very significant phrase 'participated forms of mediation' is used in RM, 5d, as potentially applicable of other religions, it is immediately qualified: 'they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.'

At this point it is vital to address two very strong challenges to the argument above. (There are many more than two!). They are related indirectly and directly to our Christological focus.

First, a question of method: 'Isn't your position entirely *a priori*? Regardless of any encounter with the Others, you have decided that

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- 1 See for example Ruokanen, van Straelen – and Barth is the significant non-Catholic equivalent in the modern period.
 - 2 See for example in the USA: Knitter, Haight; in Europe: Schmidt-Leukel; in India: Wilfred; in Sri Lanka: Fieris. There are internal differences between them, and also within each of their overall writings. Dupuis is not a pluralist in Christological or trinitarian terms, but might be (problematically) in ecclesiological terms. The most significant non-Catholic pluralist is probably Hick.

they fit in a space constructed from your theological deductions. Regardless of the experience of the Indian church for example, you have assumed the outcome of what can only be discovered in engagement, in praxis.' Without minimizing the depth and complexity of this charge, I would make two responses. First, if the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed requires that we acknowledge that God is Father, Son, Spirit, fully revealed in the incarnation, we can only say that only in so much as another religion testified explicitly to the incarnation and triune God, it is misleading to use the term 'revelation' regarding these religions. So, this is not logically an *a priori* position in the sense that if another religion explicitly testified to Father, Son, Spirit the strictures would not hold. There is a genuine openness to the events of history, but so far only one incarnation has been discovered! Second, there is no *a priori* placing of any historical complex called 'Hinduism' or 'Buddhism' and so on, but an onus on a *posteriori* engagement, exploration, and encounter to see how the Word and Spirit may be acting, or to phrase it differently, to discern God's universal work in all creation and culture. *Nostra Aetate* is indicative of this impulse, even if it was not nuanced enough about internal differences within traditions and did not encompass all religions. And if my critic quickly adds: 'But might you not learn something *entirely new* about the triune God through this encounter, might you not be challenged in your understanding of *truth*?' I think the answer is both obvious and opaque. It is obviously 'yes'. For example, staying with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the 'homousios' was an 'entirely new' non-biblical term that allowed Christians to clarify and deepen their understanding of the 'truth' of the incarnation. The term became accessible through intercultural dialogue, or, one might say, the ransacking of Greek philosophy! However, the answer would be no, if it meant that a 'new dogma' would change or contradict an earlier one: for example, that God should now be proclaimed as binitarian, not trinitarian. However, if it meant that I Gavin might learn that truth is 'personal' from my reading of Martin Buber, or the truth that God's transcendence is so often minimized from my meetings with an ardent Muslim friend, or that non-violence is truth from my reading of Mahatma Gandhi and reflection on his life and contemporary

disciples, or that silent meditation would enrich my practice from a Zen practitioner, then I have no problem with this; although each of these narratives would require careful unpacking. The history of the church testifies to this on-going sometimes creative dialogue. But none of this would require either my saying that now the truth of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed is superseded, requires correction, or is in itself inadequate, nor would it imply that the fullness of God's truth does not reside in Christ. It certainly might be me or my church that requires reminding of something that has been present in the Christian tradition previously or attention to a really new insight that had not been explicitly present at the beginning (egs. the Marian dogmas).

To the second objection. If the first was related to method, the second is substantive. If RM acknowledges the action of Word and Spirit in other religions then why should 'revelation' not be an appropriate word to apply to non-Christian religions? Connectedly, if Word and Spirit are present *savingly*, given that RM 10 reiterates traditional teaching that salvation is granted to those outside the visible boundaries of the church in certain circumstances, shouldn't we acknowledge the indivisible relationship between salvation and revelation?

On the first objection, three responses are in order. First, if revelation is reserved for the unambiguous self-revelation of God's self by God's self, as trinitarian, then the actions of the Word and Spirit in other religions are not of the same order as the incarnation. In the words sometimes used in this debate, the point is to stress the difference in degree *as well as* difference in kind between the action of the incarnation and all subsequent human history. Any previous or subsequent divine action relates to a 'participated mediation' in this single event. In one sense this applies very differently to the Roman Catholic Church, and subsequently to the other Christian churches and communities, and then, the various religions. Second, the tradition on this matter uses a variety of terms to indicate this action of God outside the visible boundaries of the church: *preparatio evangelica*, the 'seeds of the Word', and so on – which have a wide variety of semantic reference, but all in common, indicate that these events are not yet the fullness of the incarnation, but are related to it at least

causally, both in origin and ends. The different modalities of this relation other than causally should be considered as a disputed question, yet to be resolved, well worth exploring in the future. Third, the practical significance of the action of the Word and Spirit can never be pre-determined in the sense that it requires Christians to be deeply attentive to the world religions if they are to be faithful to their Lord, for he is already beyond the boundaries of our camp.

The second point related to the intrinsic relationship between salvation and revelation is a most interesting issue and now, I can only make one point – and will use Rahner to make it. Rahner affirmed salvation in other religions, but he registered two important qualifications that are sometimes neglected by later followers. First, he qualified this viz. the authenticity of a 'lawful religion' until a non-Christian had been historically and existentially confronted by the gospel. After this, their religion could not be regarded as salvific for them if they refused Christianity. Clearly, the point, given the messy realities at stake, is the necessity of explicit faith at some point in the journey towards the fullness of salvation. Second, in his theology of death (which changes), he is nevertheless consistent in making the point that the beatific vision is the final touchstone for salvation, and this can only be enjoyed with an explicit faith in the triune God. This is the reason why there was such close attention to Jacques Dupuis' claim that the other religions were means to salvation. His qualifications were unequal to that of Rahner's.

I do not have enough space to unpack the further Christological assertions related to our topic that take their definitive impulse from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, but one further element needs comment. This relates to the many recent attempts to employ the Spirit to break the so-called 'Christological impasse' in this debate.³ Constantinople admittedly spoke of the Spirit 'proceeding forth from the Father' and it was only later that this was re-phrased to 'proceeds

3 See Knitter, and various non-Catholic theologians. There is a curious parallel here with using Christology, rather than pneumatology, to get round this impasse, in Dupuis' distinction between the Logos *asarkos* and *ensarkos*.

from the Father and the Son', in part to mark the intrinsic relations between all three persons that were implicit in Constantinople. It would be wrong to imagine that the Christological impasse (not Christomonism) is avoidable. Paul recognised it as a scandal, a stumbling block, and if we remove it, we remove the basis of our faith. RM, 29 put it starkly, bringing out yet a further (ecclesiological) dimension to this question: 'the universal activity of the Spirit is not to be separated from his particular activity within the Body of Christ, which is the Church.' So, the Spirit can be neither severed from Christ - or his Mystical Body, the Church. This requires a number of issues to be clarified in our debate. (1) What is the modality of the Spirit's action and the Word's action, how are they to be distinguished, related, and discerned? (2) In what precise manner is this activity of the Spirit and Word related to the Church? Dupuis notes, for example, the way *Lumen Gentium*, 16 adopts 'ordinantur', eschewing the language of membership, belonging, or visible bonds. Does this really imply abandonment of efficient instrumental causality regarding the Church? As early as Constantinople the ecclesia had been itemised in the creed along with the triune reality, and linked to the Son, through the Spirit. This was surely the creedal impulse for the *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* tradition that kept trinity and ecclesiology intrinsically interrelated, yet distinct.

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Creedal Formula, End or Beginning? - The Nicaea-Constantinople Creed in the age of Dialogue initiated by Vatican II

Sebastian Painadath

In his article, Sebastian Painadath shows how Christians can be deeply attentive to the world religions and the action of the Word and Spirit and how we can recognize them beyond the boundaries set by creedal formulas. What is articulated in the creeds is a faith statement and it is 'the limited but authentic expression of a concrete experience of being gripped by the Divine in a believing community.' It is conditioned by history and culture and it offers certain parameters for theological exploration for our times in our cultures that are different from the Mediterranean milieu. Painadath raises the question whether such a theological exploration responding to the challenges of our context which calls for a culture of dialogue means a weakening of Christian faith. He answers in the negative. In fact, according to him, 'through inter-religious dialogue we discover the deeper meaning of life in Christ and grow in credibility in giving witness to Christ'

The Nicaea-Constantinople Creed is reflected in the basic faith-vision of the documents of the II. Vatican Council. Some significant Christological faith-statements of the II. Vatican Council are the following.

Christ is God: in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily (AG. 3).

Christ is the image of the invisible God (GS. 10).

In him all things came into being: in him all things hold together (LG. 7).

God decided to enter into history in a new and definite way (AG.3).
 In the human nature Christ united to himself the Son of God (LG.7).
 In Christ God fully revealed himself and his ways (DV.4).

Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of God on earth and revealed to us the mystery of the Father (LG.3).

Christ redeemed man and transformed him into a new creation through his death and resurrection (LG.7).

Christ came to make human beings sharers in the divine nature (AG.3).

Christ is the way and the truth, our model, master, liberator, saviour, life-giver (AG.8).

Faith, Culture and Creed

These are faith statements: articulations of the basic experience of the divine presence in a believing community. Any such creedal statement has three elements: i) it is true to the original faith-experience ; ii) it responds to the grace and demand of the contemporary situation of life (iii) it is the expression of the *sensus fidelium*. A faith statement is not a metaphysical thesis nor is it just a psychological perception. A faith statement cannot claim to be the absolute norm for all human persons, nor is it a matter of mere subjective speculation of a few. It is rather the limited but authentic expression of a concrete experience of being gripped by the Divine in a believing community that is conditioned by history and culture. Spirituality is the universal experience of the presence of the divine Spirit. Faith is a concrete entry to spirituality. Creed is a limited articulation of faith.

The encounter between the community's experience of the Divine and the context of life is an ongoing process. Faith encounters culture in ever new forms and with fresh accents in the historical evolution of the believing community. The *symbols* of faith of the early centuries of the Church were formulated either by theologians or by the Councils in response to concrete challenges evolving from the Mediterranean cultural context. They do offer certain parameters for theological exploration; but the Mediterranean milieu is not the *locus theologicus* of the global Church today. The Greco-Roman cultural ambience is not the same as the Asian cultural situation of today. Hence the

creative process of exploring the deeper meaning of the pristine experience has to reach out to the pluri-cultural and multi-religious world of today. New *symbols* of faith need to evolve. In fact the local Councils and Synods of the Church did develop over the centuries creedal formulae in response to the challenges of the situation.

The Culture of Dialogue

The II Vatican Council has inaugurated a new era in the Catholic Church. Describing the newness of it Pope Paul VI said: "Dialogue is the new way of being the Church"¹. Dialogue with other Churches and religions as well as dialogue with secular cultures and modern sciences is the horizon in which theology today explores new symbols. It is in this horizon that the pristine faith in Christ the Lord and Saviour has to be reinterpreted. There are two ways of doing this:

(i) to present faith in Jesus the Christ *against* the religions and cultures of humanity as the absolute *norma normans non normata*.

(ii) to present faith in Jesus the Christ *with* other religions and cultures as the light in which we Christians look at the world process.

In the first approach the liturgical heritage, the great traditions and the dogmatic formulations of the Church become decisive. In the second approach the signs of the times, the present reality and the pluralistic experience of people are taken seriously. There is no either or. The question is: where do we put the accent? The dialogical culture that the II. Vatican Council brought about a shift from the tradition-bound approach to the process to "listening to what the Spirit is telling the Church" through the *signs of the times* in the contemporary world (GS.4), that is becoming globally one and religious-culturally pluralistic (GS.1, NA.1).

Christ: God-with-us

The fundamental question here is this: how do we look at Jesus Christ today? There are apparently three ways of looking at him: (i) Focus on the Jesus of history, with the consequent retrospective concerns; (ii) Emphasis on the Lordship of Jesus Christ, with the consequent exclusivist attitudes, (iii) Experience of the *Emmanuel*

1 Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, 65

with the consequent dialogical approach to religions and cultures. Along the third way we recognize Jesus Christ as God's presence here and now. Christ is the God-unto-us / God-with-us / God-within-us. "Christ is now at work in human hearts through the power of his Spirit" (GS.38). In Christ we encounter the compassionate face of the Divine turned towards humanity, the critical affirmation of God on the world. Through Christ we realise that this earth is the body of God, that our history is God's history, that God participates in our suffering, that God transforms everything through our creative endeavours. "The message of Christ is that God is with us, to deliver us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to eternal life." (DV.5) Christ is the divine Light in which we Christians "discern the signs of God's presence and power" in the historical process (GS.11). "Christ animates, purifies and reinforces the noble aspirations which drive the human family to make its life one that is more human and to direct the whole earth to this end." (GS.38)

In the light of Christ we understand the entire history of humanity as the history of divine revelation and of salvation. "In Christ the Church finds the key, the focal point, and the goal of all human history." (GS.10). "History is the arena where we see what God does for humanity".² God's Spirit has been at work in the hearts of all people and in the symbols of religions all through history. Hence Christian faith enables us to have "a deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where it wills."³

Religions: Expressions of the God-with-us

If the history of humanity can be seen as the history of the ongoing dialogue between God and the humans we can locate certain *peak moments* of this Divine-human encounter in the spiritual evolution of human history. In such *kairos* moments people recognize the emergence of a sage or a prophet, the event of Incarnation or Enlightenment, whereby the divine mystery unfolds itself in a new intensity. Religions try to discern and express the salvific meaning of

2 John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 12

3 John Paul II, *Red. Mis.* 56

this divine-human dialogue. In this sense "religions are expressions of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity."⁴ "Humans look to various religions for answers to the profound mysteries of the human condition, which deeply stir human hearts. (NA.1). In spite of several ambiguities "they can be regarded as leading humans towards the true God" (AG. 3). Holy Scriptures try to articulate the message of this intense experience, and religious symbols express the salvific meaning of this encounter. Rituals communicate the grace of this pristine encounter and theology explores new ways of interpreting this to believers. If our history is God's history with us, the religions of humanity are *spiritually* inter-related in the *one* universal process of God's self-communication. It is the one God who speaks to humanity in diverse ways, the one Logos that vibrates in different languages, the one Spirit that works in the hearts of all. The Holy Scriptures and major symbols, the sages and prophets of all religions are in fact parts of the universal spiritual heritage of humanity. In this way believers of different religions are like co-pilgrims moving towards the one goal: Life in the Divine. "We are all pilgrims...on a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendent goal which God sets for us."⁵

Faith in Christ and Religions

We Christians have experienced the *peak moment* of divine self-communication in Jesus Christ. "God's call to Truth appears at its height (*summe apparuit*) in Christ Jesus." (DH.11) Grippled by this intense experience of the Divine we exclaim in faith: "Christ is the fullness of revelation" (DV.2) "In him humans find the fullness of religious life." (NA.2). "Christ is the goal of human history, the focal point on which the longings of history and civilization turn, the centre of the human race, the joy of all hearts and the fulfillment of all desires." (GS.45). Such statements are ecstatic expressions of what Jesus Christ means to us. They are articulated in a faith-language, but they cannot be understood as a judgment on another religion. The fulfillment theory of Vat II may be understood as an invitation to follow the way

4 John Paul II. Rome. 13.12.1992

5 John Paul II. Assisi, 07.09.1994, 27.10.1986

of Christ with authenticity and commitment, but it is not to be interpreted as a verdict on other religions. Faith in Christ in fact invites us to “have a great respect for the ways of acting and living, as well as the precepts and teaching of other religions”, and motivates us “to recognize, preserve and promote the spiritual and ethical goods, the socio-cultural values found among them.” (NA.2). With this openness to the Spirit we find ourselves on a spiritual pilgrimage with followers of other religions. Inter-religious dialogue is human response to God’s ongoing dialogue with humanity. “Through dialogue we make God present in our midst for, as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God.”⁶ In the Scriptures of another religion we respectfully listen to the Word of God; in their symbols we devoutly discern the presence of God; through their sages we genuinely open ourselves to the Spirit *that blows where it wills*. Gradually an inter-religious hermeneutic evolves in theological pursuits: one religion interprets the other in the universal process of Divine-human dialogue. In encounter with a Muslim or Hindu we humans stand in awe before the ineffable mystery of the divine Spirit. In walking with them we Christians are helped to deepen our experience of the Divine in Christ. As co-pilgrims we share our Christ-experience with them. But we do not project Christ *against* other religions claiming absolute normativity for our faith-experience. We live today in a world where a critico-creative encounter with sisters and brothers of other religions has become a constitutive dimension of grasping God’s ways with humans. Dialogue is the language of theology today.

Does this mean a weakening of Christian faith? Not at all! On the contrary, through inter-religious dialogue we discover the deeper meaning of life in Christ and grow in credibility in giving witness to Christ. It is though the *thou* that *I* become truly myself! It is through encounter with the religious other that a Christian in future becomes truly Christian. The dialogical nature of human existence, the dialogical character of God’s ongoing revelation in history and the contemporary situation of religious pluralism – all demand a culture of dialogue in pursuing Christian theology and spirituality as well as in shaping Christian life with credibility. Like a tree: the deeper we grow in Christ-

6 . John Paul II, Madras, 05.02.1986

experience, the more related we will be in association with others. The religious person of the future will be an inter-religious person: one will be criticized and enriched by the religious heritage of the other. The Christian of the future will be a spiritual pilgrim with believers of other religions.

Towards an Asian Culture of Dialogue

The culture of dialogue is the consequence of the new vision initiated by the II. Vatican Council. As we have noted above there is a constant emphasis on this new culture in the allocutions of Pope John Paul II. The perspectives of the Federation of the Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) are more articulate on this. Just to mention a few statements:

In the diversity of **religions** the Asian Churches discover clearly the working of the Divine Spirit: "World religions are significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation."⁷ "They are expressions of the presence of God's Word and of the universal action of the divine Spirit."⁸ "They reveal the diverse ways of responding to God whose Spirit is active in all peoples and cultures."⁹ "Plurality and diversity are seen, not as a problem, but as richness."¹⁰ "Diversity is not something to be regretted and abolished, but to be rejoiced over and promoted."¹¹ "God's saving will is at work in many different ways in all these religions."¹² "Down through the centuries the ancient religions of the orient have expressed the noblest longings in the hearts of our people, our deepest joys and sorrows. They have shaped our history, and our way of thinking. They are part of our culture. For us in Asia, they have been the doorway to God."¹³

Since religions are sacred elements of the universal process of Divine-human dialogue, there is need for a creative **dialogue** among

7 FABC, Plenary Assembly Statement, 1974, No.12

8 FABC- Theol. Consultation Statement, 1991, No.43.

9 FABC- BIRA IV/7, 1988, No. 12.

10 FABC- BIRA IV/7, 1988, No. 12.

11 FABC- BIRA IV/11, 1988, 15.

12 FABC- BIRA II, 1979, 12.

13 FABC- First Plenary Assembly Statement, 1974, No. 12.

various religions. "The many ways of responding to the promptings of the divine Spirit must be continually in conversation with one another."¹⁴ "Religions are complementary perceptions of the ineffable divine mystery. No particular religion can raise the claim of being the norm for all others."¹⁵ A responsible inter-religious hermeneutics is the call of the hour because "God's saving will is at work in many different ways in all these religions."¹⁶ "In the rich diversity of ancient cultures and religions there is vision of unity in diversity, a communion of life among diverse peoples."¹⁷

A culture of dialogue is possible only if believers of different religions live in **respect** for one another. "The otherness of the other should always be respected in the process of dialogue."¹⁸ "The test of true harmony lies in the acceptance of diversity as richness."¹⁹ "The action of the divine Spirit cannot be reduced to persons, traditions, religions and institutions."²⁰ "When various religious groups lay absolute claims to truth, aggressive militancy and divisive proselytism follow and in their wake bitter religious divisions."²¹

We Christians experience in **Christ** the way of salvation. "For us Christians, our way of participation in God's enterprise is Jesus, who died in order to find and give life."²² "Christ is the centre of the process of God's continuous dialogue with humanity."²³ "Together with sisters and brothers of other religions we seek that fullness of Christ, which is God's plan for the whole of creation, in its entirety

14 FABC- First Plenary Assembly Statement, 1974, No. 12.

15 FABC- BIRA V/3, 1995, No. 6.

16 FABC-BIRA: II, 1979, No.12

17 FABC- Fifth Plenary Assembly Statement, 1995, No.10

18 FABC-BIRA.V/3,1995, No. 8:4

19 FABC- BIRA V/1 1992

20 FABC- BIRA IV/1, 1984, No.10.

21 FABC- BIRA IV/4 1987, 2

22 FABC- BIRA IV/12, 1991, 7

23 FABC- Mission Congress, 1979, W.III,3

and diversity.”²⁴ “Any discernment of the Holy Spirit stands in relation to the Church’s memory and interpretation of the reality of Jesus Christ.”²⁵

Conversion from one religion to another is not at all the objective of dialogue.

In true dialogue “each one speaks of those things which are deepest and most meaningful”, “without intending to convert any of the partners to the other’s religion”²⁶. “Dialogue aimed at converting the other to one’s own religious faith and tradition is dishonest and unethical.”²⁷ “Sincere and authentic dialogue does not have for its objective the *conversion* of the other: conversion depends solely on God’s internal call and the person’s free decision.”²⁸

The perspective of religious **harmony** is a unique contribution of the FABC. “Harmony (*samanvaya*) is the spiritual pursuit of the totality of reality in its infinite diversity and radical unity. Since the ultimate ground of being is unity-in-plurality, the divergent forms of reality are perceived in the convergent rhythm that harmonises them. Harmony evolves by respecting the otherness of the other and by acknowledging its significance in relation to the totality. Consequently the unique significance of every religion is gratefully and critically perceived within the context of the universal spiritual evolution of humanity. Religions as they are manifested in history are complementary perceptions of the ineffable divine mystery. No particular religion can raise the claim of being the norm for all others. We religious believers are co-pilgrims, who share intimate spiritual experiences and reflections with one another with concern and compassion, with genuine openness to Truth and the freedom of spiritual seekers. In this process we become increasingly sensitive to human suffering and collaborate in promoting justice, peace and ecological wholeness. We walk together on the

24 FABC- BIM(A I,1978,10

25 FABC-BIRA IV/31986,13

26 FABC-Consultation, 1983, No.13; FABC-BIRA. IV/1, 1984, No.11.

27 FABC-BIRA. V/3,1995,No.7.

28 FABC-BIRA III, 1982, No. 4

path of dialogue and service towards harmony as sisters and brothers bound in one Love and drawn by the divine Truth”²⁹

Christ and the Spirit

The Nicaea-Constantinople Creed is not the end of faith-formulation, but the beginning of a series of creative expressions of Christian faith. Today we need to explore ‘the breadth and the length, the height and the depth of the mystery of Christ’ together with believers of other religions. We live in a new age of the Spirit, in a new epoch of the Church, in a period of great grace and immense possibilities. In as much as we respect the sisters and brothers of other religions as co-pilgrims we are prepared to share with them our Christ-experience and learn from them their salvific experience of the divine presence. A key to develop Christology in this dialogical process is given in an enigmatic statement of the II Vatican Council: “The Holy Spirit offers to everyone the possibility of sharing in the paschal mystery in a manner known to God.” (GS, 22). The paschal event of Christ is, according to our faith, the way that God opened for the salvation of all. But it is the divine Spirit that leads seekers along this way. How does this happen? – this we do not know! This is the mystery that we can go on exploring with great respect for the manifold forms in which the Spirit deals with believers of different religions. The salvific rootedness in the Divine we experience in Christ (others experience it in other forms); but the divine sap of the Holy Spirit makes humanity branch off in different directions with an immense diversity of spiritual experiences. All are deeply inter-related like branches of the *one* tree. All are nourished by the *one* Spirit. The polarity between Christic rootedness and pneumatic relatedness is the core issue in the emerging theology of religions. Neither narrow exclusivism nor naïve pluralism is creative. Creative Christian theology has to evolve in the dialectics between Christology and Pneumatology.

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What is New about Jesus Christ?

Jacob Parappally

The Editor in his article "What is new about Jesus Christ" says that it is in the interest of the Church's vocation and to her mission that she effectively communicates her message about Jesus Christ. So the Church should consistently hold a positive attitude to other religious traditions which are also to be served by the revelation in Jesus Christ. Other religious traditions have a right to hear the message of the Gospel and it has to be proclaimed in a language intelligible to them. According to the author, the revelation of the Self-emptying God in Jesus Christ who came to serve humankind would be acceptable to them.

The early theologians of the Church interpreted Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Jewish expectations as well as the fulfilment of the hope cherished by the Gentiles of all times. Ignatius of Antioch (110 A.D.), for example, proclaimed Jesus Christ as the "ground for hoping that (all of humanity) may be converted and may win their way to God". Further, he affirmed that Jesus was "our common name and common hope".¹ The followers of Jesus Christ believe that he is indeed the common name and common hope meant for the whole of humanity. They encounter him as the Way, the Truth and the Life. They experience him as the beginning and the end of their lives, and therefore, the ultimate meaning of their lives. They confess him as the Lord of history and the universe who lived and died at a particular time in history and yet is alive after his death, leading all to the fullness

1 Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephesians*: 10.1; 1.2.

of life. But something bound up with this transforming experience of Jesus Christ is that it must be shared or proclaimed in a meaningful way so that the same Jesus Christ can be encountered by the people of all cultures and languages. It is absolutely imperative for the Church which "lives, moves and has its being" in Jesus Christ to proclaim Him in a way that other people can really "hear" the word of proclamation.

In the multi-religious society of the Roman Empire, the early Church found creative ways to theologise and proclaim the universal significance of Jesus Christ. When the Roman Empire accepted Jesus Christ as its Lord and Saviour, Christianity became a mono-religious culture without any challenge to its claims about Jesus Christ from outside. It had to face only the internal challenges with regard to the wrong interpretations of the person of Christ which were countered by the early councils, especially, the council of Chalcedon. The Church articulated "who Jesus Christ is" in dialogue with Judaism and the Greco-Roman world. Such a finished Christology with its ready-made Christ image did not make much impact on the peoples of Asia for the last twenty centuries because Asian people have different cultures and world-views which cannot understand the "language" of Christian proclamation. Moreover, the religions of Asia claim to have their own mediators, saviours who seemed to have shown them the ways of salvation. They might find "Christ an exotic figure more or less appealing, of a suspicious constructor associated with the conquering and invading foreigners",² a threat to their traditional religions and cultures. The latter understanding of Christ and Christianity as a threat is growing stronger in India and elsewhere in Asia. This is clearly seen in the anti-Christian propaganda of the Hindu fundamentalism in India which led to the martyrdom of some missionaries in recent months. In this context, what are the ways to proclaim Jesus Christ in a language meaningful and challenging to the people of other religions so that they may encounter him as the "fullness of life" and not as a threat to their authentic cultures and traditions.

2 R. Panikkar, *A Christophany for our Times*, The Thirty-fifth Annual Robert Cardinal Bellarmine Lecture, *Theology Digest* 39:1 (1992), p. 4.

In this article I would like to underline the above concerns and show why such an approach to Christology is imperative in the Indian context if we take the “mission command” (Mt 28:18-20) of Jesus Christ seriously. Further, in the context of religious pluralism in India I would suggest an approach to proclaiming Jesus Christ that is challenging and not threatening, respectful and not aggressive, relational and not relative.

1. Towards a Meaningful Indian Christology: Problems and Prospects

Proclaim Jesus Christ, we must. Invite people to experience his life-giving presence in and through His Spirit in the Church, we must. But should we go on repeating certain Christological affirmation articulated in a language which is not only not meaningful to our listeners but also has such a negative impact on them that they reject our message? Should we use exclusive and absolutist expressions to proclaim the centrality of Jesus Christ in the universal salvific plan of God (1Tm 2:4-5) that hinder the people of other religions from hearing the Good News of salvation? Should we make absolute statements about other religions and their founders and their religious experiences, even sometimes denigrating them as if we knew all about the mysterious ways of God who “shows no partiality” and to whom “in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable” (Acts 10:34-35)? The history of Christian proclamation in the colonial era had been, to a great extent, aggressive, exclusive and triumphalistic, contradicting even Apostle Peter’s exhortation “to be always prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1Pt 3:15).

The colonizers could not discover Christ’s presence through His Spirit in the positive values of the religious traditions of their colonial subjects as it would have probably hampered their claim to superiority, not only in military might but also in religion and culture. In the colonial and post-colonial era in Asia and particularly in India, the Christian claims of being the only true religion possessing the absolute truth, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and His Church for salvation etc. were

not only not understood by the followers of other religions, but also conveyed to them the opposite of what was intended by such claims. For people who hold an inclusive and relational world-view any absolute and exclusive claims about Jesus Christ and His Church would reduce Jesus Christ to a tribal God and the Church to a religious sect. Jesus Christ, thus, becomes one among the founders of religions or one of the incarnations or a great Guru or a prophet or one who reached the fullness of self-realization. They would consider him as one among many historical manifestations of the Absolute. How does it happen? Is not our proclamation clear and unambiguous? Indeed it is! But it is meaningful only to those who share the Judeo-Christian world-view. For those whose world-view operates on the epistemological principle of identity rather than on the principle of contradiction and for whom trans-historical truths are more real than historical facts, liberation from ignorance is more important than liberation from sin, symbolic religious expressions are more evocative and experiential than creeds or dogmatic formulations, any exclusive statements about religious truths fail to fit into the scheme of things. So the struggle of any Indian Christian theologian is to translate the Church's faith-affirmation about the person and mission of Jesus Christ into a language meaningful to the people so that they can respond to him with their whole heart and mind.

To present a meaningful Christology in the Indian context is not easy. In fact, the plurality and complexity of the situation demands a plurality of Christologies in dialogue with the "great traditions" and the "little traditions"³ which have their own world-views as well as both liberative and oppressive elements. The Christian experience of Jesus Christ as the fullness of life can challenge the dehumanising elements of these cultures and religions. Openness to the positive elements of the other religious traditions can enrich the Christian understanding of the mystery of Jesus Christ. But the prospect of

3 Anthropologists like M.N. Srinivas use the terms "Great Tradition" and "Little Tradition" to show the distinction between classical Hindu tradition and the popular religiosity of the sub-altern people. See M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs in South India*, London, 1952.

enriching our present understanding of the mystery of Christ is possible only if we give up the claim of having exhausted all the possibilities of understanding the mystery of Jesus Christ. It also means that we have to give up the presumption that our so called universally valid, a-temporal, *a priori* articulations about Jesus Christ are intelligible to the people of all cultures and world-views.

It is clear to those who encounter Jesus Christ in the living tradition of the Church and understand the challenges of their inherited Indian world-view that their faith-affirmations, are not intelligible to their listeners. Therefore, Indian theologians are convinced of the need to present the truths of Christian revelation in various ways meaningful in the Indian context. Their attempts may be construed as relativising the fundamental truths of Christian revelation. Sometimes they are even accused of not affirming the uniqueness of Christ as the only saviour. It is understandable that some may make such accusations if the pedagogical methods employed by the Indian theologians are not properly understood by those who do not have the lived experience of the context of Indian theological reflection.

The proclamation of Jesus Christ in dialogue with the Indian context of religious pluralism and the dehumanising socio-cultural and economic situation must convince the proclaimers of the Gospel that:

1. Jesus Christ's cosmic and trans-historical presence as well as his presence through his Spirit in all that is good and beautiful and perfect must be the point of departure and his historical presence must be the point of arrival in the proclamation of the Gospel. This is imperative as an overemphasis on the historicity of Jesus at the beginning of the proclamation reduces him to one among the historical founders of religion.

2. Jesus Christ cannot be meaningfully proclaimed in the Indian context in isolation or separated from the "many and varied ways God has spoken to our fathers" (Heb 1:1f). Other founders of religions and other ways of salvation *need not be understood as parallel or complimentary to God's revelation through Jesus Christ* which is "once and for all". There is no need even to consider them as participating in the mediation of Jesus Christ. According to the Scripture

they can be considered as ways of God's dealing with humanity in particular cultures and nations in the past (Heb 1:1f) and it is reasonable to conclude that the old economy of God continues to those people who have not yet encountered Jesus Christ. Such an understanding does not reduce the missionary zeal for proclaiming the Good News, as feared by some, but enhances it by a deeper reverence to the mystery of God's will and respect for human persons, cultures and authentic religious tradition.

3. The revelation in Jesus Christ is *new*, calling for free response and total commitment. God wills to save all humans through him (1Tm 2:4-5). This, I believe, is the sufficient and compelling reason for the Church's mission. So there is no need to categorize other religious mediations and mediators as deficient ways to salvation in order to show the centrality of Jesus Christ in the economy of salvation. Such an approach would create only insurmountable difficulties in the proclamation of the Gospel. The newness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ is powerful enough to challenge and transform persons and societies.

4. God's Spirit present in the authentic values of other religions and cultures cannot be separated from Jesus Christ. Following the spirit of Vatican II, especially of *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio* acknowledges the Church's recognition of the presence and action of the Spirit beyond the boundaries of the Church. He says that "the Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures, and religions".⁴ The Indian and Asian attempts to recognize the "hidden presence" of Christ through his Spirit in the authentic religious and cultural traditions, in no way, separates Jesus Christ from his Spirit but promotes the tremendous possibilities of proclaiming the centrality of Jesus Christ. Discovering the Spirit's presence and action in the complex realities of India/Asia leads to the encounter with Jesus Christ whose Spirit he is. In his Apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* Pope John Paul II underlined the inseparability of the action of

4 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 28.

the Holy Spirit and the universal salvation in Christ and the Church's commitment to follow the promptings to fulfil her mission.⁵

5. The proclamation of God's kingdom through dialogue with all those who are committed to create a just society in no way dilutes the commitment to Christ and the emergence of the Church but facilitates them. In the self-emptying commitment of Christians for the transformation of their unjust societies and in their courage to stand up for the values of the kingdom as well as in their readiness to suffer the consequences, people of other religious traditions discover the liberating and kenotic image of Christ.

The quest for an image or images of Jesus Christ that takes into account the above concerns without jettisoning any of the fundamental affirmations of Christian faith impels the Indian theologians to discover creative ways to communicate God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

2. Challenging Newness of Jesus Christ

In the 19th century some Hindus and the Hindu converts to Christianity made attempts to present Jesus Christ in a language meaningful to Hindus. They discovered the challenging newness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ to bring about the integral liberation of humans. While a Hindu reformer like Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) presented Jesus as the Supreme Guide to Happiness, Keshub Chunder (1838-1884), remaining on the border of Hinduism and Christianity, saw Jesus as the fulfilment of Hinduism, the apex of organic evolution: *Cit* (Consciousness) of the Trinitarian God (*Sat-Cit-Ananda* = Being-Consciousness-Bliss). For Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907), a Brahmin convert to Christianity and the so called father of Indian Christian Theology, Jesus Christ was the Transcendent Image of the Supreme *Brahman and Nara-Hari* (God-Man). Following this line of interpreting Jesus Christ from the Indian cultural and religious tradition some have attempted to present Jesus as the unique *Avatara* (Incarnation), *Isvara* (Personal aspect of the supra-personal Absolute), *Adi Purusha* (The Primordial Person), *Prajapati* (the Lord of the creatures), *Vimochakan* (the liberator),

5 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 17-18.

Satyagrahi, Yogi etc. Surprisingly, these attempts at interpreting Christ in the Indian context had no serious influence on the Christian proclamation and praxis as the Church viewed these attempts with suspicion.

In the Eighties, the Third World theologians evaluated the various Christological models of the Asian context and found them inadequate in responding to the plurality of religions and the pervading poverty of Asia.⁶ The "fulfilment theology" of the 1930's with its recognition of the Christ-of-the-religions, was an initiative to counteract the "civilization theology" of the Western missionaries and colonizers. But it failed to recognize the Christ-of-the-poor. The ashramic Christ of the late 60s was a protest against the "development theology" of neo-colonialist. The ashramic movement, recognizing greed as the enemy within, embraced voluntary poverty and simplicity but failed to see the structural greed of systems and structures and to participate actively in the struggles of the poor for liberation. Thus the inculturation Christology of the late 70s, developed in opposition to "liberation Christology" failed to see the link between religion and liberation. In India/Asia, there are many cultures and classes in one religion and many religions in one culture. There are both liberative and oppressive elements in religions as well as in cultures. The awareness of such a complex situation was the compelling force that motivated the Indian/Asian theologians to make attempts to present an image of Jesus Christ who is the Christ-of-the-religions-and-the-poor.

In the context of many religions that claim to be ways of liberation from the misery of human existence and the presence of millions of poor who look for socio-economic and political liberation what is *new* about the person and message of Jesus Christ? This *newness* must be communicated through meaningful words, actions and life-style rather than repeating terms which are unintelligible, exclusive and

6 "The Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology". Fifth Conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (New Delhi, August 17-29, 1981), Document, Vidyajyoti 46 (1982), p. 92. See also, Aloysius Pieris, "Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in Third World Theology", Vidyajyoti 46 (1982), pp. 166-170.

offensive to the people of other religions. The whole of apostolic witness and praxis was about the newness of God's action in history in the person of Jesus Christ that it became the *New Testament*. The covenantal relationship God established through him was interpreted and proclaimed as the *New Covenant*. Till the establishment of the *new heaven* and *new earth* this new message has to be proclaimed. Unlike the exclusive and univocal terms that we prefer to use to explain who Jesus Christ is, the challenging newness of Jesus Christ, if properly communicated, can bring many to encounter him. This, I believe, is the task of theology in the Indian/Asian context.

Can we identify some of the elements that can communicate the *newness* of God's revelation in Jesus Christ that can adequately respond to the soteriological concerns of the people of other religions, their quest for integral liberation and their longing for harmony among humans, God and cosmos? I believe that it is possible and necessary in order to enter into a meaningful dialogue with the people of other religions and to invite them to experience Jesus Christ. Some of the elements of this newness of Christic revelation can be outlined as follows:

1. In Jesus Christ one can encounter a self-emptying God, hitherto unknown in the history of revelation. In him the Absolute became relative, Infinite became finite, God became human, Word became flesh (Jn 1:14). In him God came to serve and not to be served (Mk 10:45). Thus the self-emptying figure of Christ (Phil 2:7) can be encountered as the servant of everything perfect, good, true, beautiful and authentically liberative in all religious traditions whether Great or Little, Meta-cosmic or cosmic, unitive or messianic. He is not only the liberative potential of Asian religious traditions but has the power to actualise it in reality.

2. If Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human as the Council of Chalcedon confesses and proclaims, he cannot but be what he revealed himself to be in history, the servant of God, humanity and the cosmos. In him is the self-disclosure of God that God is not only the Lord but also the servant of all and everything. This is the radical *kenosis*, the paradox of Christic revelation, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles, but, indeed, the power and wisdom of God (1Cor

1:25). Self-emptying is the essence of the Trinitarian Oneness. "There is no other name" (Acts 4:12) that reveals this mystery of the God as a self-emptying God who becomes the servant of his own creation. The newness, decisiveness, normativeness and the universal validity of Jesus Christ consist in his servanthood of everything authentically human, be it culture, religion, systems or structures. This self-emptying servanthood is expressed in the foot-washing of the disciples at the Last Supper (Jn 13:3-15). This revelation subverts all human categories of discrimination: superiority and inferiority, higher class and lower class, high caste, low caste and untouchable, patriarchalism and matriarchalism, male and female, Christian and Pagan, believers and non-believers, civilized and uncivilized etc. It challenges the religious and secular structures that perpetuate the systems of discrimination and dehumanisation and energizes the forces of liberation whether religious or secular.

3. The self-emptying image of Jesus Christ can reveal the power of the powerless, can identify with them and energize them to struggle for a fuller human life and at the same time liberate them from the forces of alienation within themselves as well as within the structures and the systems which enslave them. Jesus Christ reveals a suffering God who suffers when human suffer as he is love itself. This new revelation in Jesus Christ has tremendous influence on the people who suffer from oppressive images of God.

4. The kenotic Christ can fulfil the longing of the Asian people for liberation from greed, acquisitiveness, egoism and the fragmentation of reality. He can reveal the necessity of an ethical religiosity for integral liberation over the cultic and Gnostic religiosity. Jesus of Nazareth revealed a God who is anthropocentric and cosmocentric (Jn 3:16) and not self-centred because he was by nature a self-emptying God. A kenotic Christ can perform his prophetic function in the Asian context by challenging all the religious traditions including Christianity to be authentically anthropocentric and care for the whole creation. He reveals the interrelationship of God, humans and the world.

5. The kenotic Christ can energize all those who encounter him to promote everything authentically human and liberative in the various religious traditions, cultures, and socio-political and economic systems

with respect, love and a self-emptying attitude. Such an encounter with the kenotic Christ would also empower them to identify themselves with those who are committed to fight against the forces of unfreedom and build God's own Kingdom where the self-emptying of God is the source and model for communion and communities of justice, love, compassion, fellowship, peace, reconciliation and, indeed, wholeness.

Conclusion

The Christian proclamation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is misunderstood and is rejected by people of other religions. They seem to consider such claims as emanating from the Christian sense of superiority, arrogance and a colonial mentality. It is in the interest of Church's vocation and commitment to her mission that she speaks a language that promotes an effective communication of her message about Jesus Christ. This means that the Church should consistently hold a positive attitude to other religious traditions which are to be served by the revelation in Jesus Christ. Other religious traditions have a right to hear the message of the Gospel and therefore the Church has a duty to proclaim it in a language intelligible to them.

The Scripture reveals to us a self-emptying God who came to serve. This is the newness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This new revelation in history of that which transcends history does not destroy all that is true and beautiful in other religious traditions and cultures. This truth can be credibly communicated only by those who encounter Jesus Christ's hidden presence in them through his Spirit. His hidden presence and action can also be recognized in those who are committed to all authentic values of the Kingdom. However, an exclusive tribal Christology hinders dialogue with the members of other religions and prevent their encounter with Jesus Christ.

Jesus' mission was to proclaim and establish right relationships within and among the humans themselves and with God and the cosmos. Jesus' proclamation of "the Kingdom of God" or "the Kingdom of Heaven" stressed the vertical and horizontal relationship of the Human for the establishment of a new society. Following the kenotic Christ the disciples are given the grace and obligation to "gather

up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost" (Jn 6:12) from the Indian/Asian religious traditions and people's movements for the building up of a new society.

The significance of Jesus Christ for India/Asia for its integral liberation will be recognized when the people of other religions and the oppressed and marginalized are able to see Jesus Christ's self-emptying face in his Church's servanthood struggling with and for other to build a new society where a harmony based on the recognition of God's sovereignty, justice, equality and "co-existence" of religions and cultures prevail. The newness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ becomes visible and challenging and effective when the disciples commit themselves to this unique service to humanity and the world.

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Human Transformation to *Omega Point* (Christ) As Envisaged in the Philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin

Chacko Valiaveetil

Chack Valiaveetil gives a short but clear summary of Teilhard de Chardin's fascinating vision of the gradual transformation taking place in us, human beings, through the evolutionary process until it reaches its Omega Point, which is Christ.

Fr. Teilhard de Chardin has a fascinating vision of the gradual transformation that is taking place in human beings through the evolutionary process. Speaking of the evolution of species he says that the transition from animals to humans was a turning point in the history of evolution. From this point onwards the evolutionary process is steadily being drawn to a final fulfillment, the ultimate goal of evolution, which he calls the OMEGA POINT, a total transformation into the image and likeness of Christ. Teilhard elucidates his vision through his ideas on Humanization, Noosphere, Co-Reflection and Ultra-Reflection.

1. Hominization: Crossing of the Threshold

The process of hominization, the point of passage from the anthropoid ape to man, must have been a momentous one. Teilhard calls this process, the Crossing of the Threshold. It implies two things: a gradual transition in one's progression and a real change in the place one arrives. We notice the gradual transition in the evolutionary

process; but where is the real change? The answer Teilhard gives is: the phenomenon of Reflection.

"... The power acquired by a consciousness to turn in upon itself, to take possession of itself as *an object*; no longer merely to know, but to know oneself ... to know that one knows, ...the living element which hereto fore had been spread out and divided over a diffuse circle of perceptions and activities, was constituted for the first time as a *centre* in the form of a point at which all the impressions and experiences knit themselves together and fuse into a unity that is conscious of its own organization."¹

For Teilhard this is a difference not simply of degree but of kind. Through reflection man has become a totally new being: "... by a tiny "tangential" increase, the "radial" was turned back on itself and, so to speak, took an infinite leap forward"².

Teilhard illustrates his view by giving two examples: 1) Water being heated to boiling point turns into vapour. 2) Taking a series of sections from the base towards the summit of a cone, their area decreases constantly... then suddenly the surface vanishes leaving us with a point.³

Against this viewpoint of Teilhard it could be objected that since animals also are 'intelligent', man is only one among equals. The answer is that in reflection man can transcend space and time whereas the animals are limited to the present in their consciousness. Another objection is that as there is a gradual transition anatomically from animal to man the same transition takes place also on the psychological and mental level.

The response to this is that the scientist as scientist may rightly say this and stop with it. But the philosopher goes beyond. He recognizes in evolution a human finality: Evolution was striving towards

1. Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York, Harper 1965, p.165) as quoted in J.F. Donceel, S.J., *Philosophical Anthropology*, Sheed and Ward, New York, 1967 pp. 76-77)
2. Teilhard, op.cit p.169
3. *ibid.* p.168

man. There is a momentous difference between the typical animal and the typical human being. This is seen in man's capacity for reflection, his scientific progress, art, literature, religion etc.

2. Noosphere

The primitive earth slowly developed an *atmosphere* and a *hydrosphere* (air and water). This was followed, after countless centuries, by the slow development of a *biosphere* (plant and animal life). Over these man started to weave a new all encompassing layer, the layer of thought, of human culture, the *noosphere*.

Teilhard sees the noosphere as a gigantic super organism which emerges gradually before our eyes. This is manifested in man's proliferating technology and constantly improving means of communication - automobiles, aeroplanes, missiles, radio, television, communication satellites, computers etc. It has its own kind of *heredity* through instruction and education (not through chromosomes and genes). This allows the coming generation to start, not where the previous one started (as with animals) but where it left off, thus paving way for unceasing progress. Another means is man's *awareness of time*, about past and future, learning from the past and planning for the future.

3. Co-Reflection

As the complexity goes on increasing there is an accompanying rise in consciousness. Here there is another threshold: though there is the continued gradual transition, there is also a sudden change of level. Teilhard calls this new threshold *co-reflection*. It is no longer the complexity of man's brain which is increasing, but rather the complexity of the brain's products, that is, tools, techniques etc. that become more and more complex. Here the rise in consciousness is not so much that of the individual as that of the group working and thinking together.

Before the advent of man on earth, the process of evolution was a fanning out: the new groups spreading out and covering new territory, giving rise to new species, races and varieties. This process continued for some time after the first appearance of man on earth spreading gradually from his primitive habitat in Africa and Indonesia, to Asia,

Europe and the Americas. Teilhard says that it looked that this process would have continued. But two influences, a double curvature as Teilhard calls it, working in the opposite direction, totally reversed the ramifying trend. These are: a) the curvature of the earth and b) the curvature of the human mind.

a. Curvature of the Earth

If the earth were flat, extending indefinitely in all directions, man perhaps would have gone on spreading and ramifying forever. But the earth is round. Man has covered practically all the surface of the earth and yet keeps multiplying. Now where to move? There is only one human solution: they must organize themselves more rationally. Compression leads to organization, that is, to complexification.

b. Curvature of the Human Mind

Beings endowed with reflection are powerfully drawn to each other. The main product of their reflection is culture, which is essentially a social phenomenon. Culture is expressed through language, literature, religion etc. which have a unifying effect which is expressed in localized groups: the tribe, city, state etc. At first there may be a very strong opposition between these groups leading to conflicts and wars. Eventually the centripetal tendencies prevail over the centrifugal ones as we are seeing today. The world is becoming a global village. Man has become more civilized. No more killing of war prisoners or destroying of women and children in a conquered city.

The increasing unification of the planet (planetization) brings about increasing organization and complexification. This means deepening interiority and increasing consciousness. Instead of fanning out, evolution now is slowly closing upon itself and 'implodes' upon itself. Mankind is the first and only species to implode upon itself.

"... The evolution of *homo sapiens*, having hitherto been expansive, is now beginning to become compressive. Inevitably this change of condition at its onset, gave us a kind of vertigo"⁴

4. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Appearance of Man*, New York, Harper 1965, pp.238-39 as quoted in J.F.Donceel, op.cit p. 119.

But Teilhard assures us that this is not something to be afraid of, but rather to feel assured. What is the ultimate outcome of this tremendous process? The view of Teilhard is that having crossed the two thresholds of reflection and co-reflection, man is now headed for a third and final threshold, that of ultra-reflection.

4. Ultra Reflection and Man

Teilhard envisages straight ahead of us, a peak of hominization which is situated in relation to us, extremely high in consciousness, even if not so far away as we might be inclined to think.⁵ Teilhard calls this peak, *Point Omega*.

Point Omega

This Point Omega cannot consist in the coalescence of all men into one supra-consciousness. This would be the pantheistic solution. This does not satisfy the conditions Omega must fulfil, viz. to safeguard forever the highest products of evolution, the highest of which is man's personal consciousness and freedom.

Unlike the countless animal species which preceded him on earth and were carried along by evolution without knowing anything about it, man as a free agent, must freely collaborate with evolution. He may refuse to collaborate, may turn away from the Point Omega and isolate himself in proud self-sufficiency. Teilhard is convinced that the vast majority of mankind will yield to the attraction of Omega, but no single individual is forced to do so against his will.

Unanimization

The main condition which must be fulfilled if this future evolution is to succeed is a growing unanimization within mankind, which is expressed in respect for others, love for one's fellow humans, sympathy and understanding. If we look into the history of humankind we can clearly see that this is what is happening. We no longer kill the inhabitants of a conquered city, women and children included, as the ancient Hebrews did under Joshua; we no longer cut off the hands of petty thieves or condone slavery. The concentration camps of

5. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Appearance of Man*, p.246 as quoted in Donceel, op.cit. pp.119-20.

Dechau and Belsen are followed by the Nurnberg trials. Pope John Paul II apologized for the crimes committed by the Church during the two thousand years of her existence.

This growing sense of unanimization, the conviction that all men and women, slowly and irresistibly, are drawing together, for the time being lives only in a few human minds. It is bound to spread, affecting more and more people and ultimately extending to the majority of the human race, thus modifying the psychological climate completely. As in physics some reactions become possible only at very high temperatures, so within mankind what appears utopian today may become possible and even easy in the future within a trasformed psychological atmosphere. Does Teilhard have any evidence for these predictions to be realized? Yes, says he; his predictions are solidly based on what he calls "human energetics".

Human Energetics

Evolution has gone on for about a billion years meeting countless dangers and obstacles and overcoming all of them. We may therefore trust that it will continue its upward movement, at least for another million years. The present vehicle for this is man and he must freely carry out this arduous task. To persevere in this task, to keep toiling, man needs a steady supply of energy. For this he needs 1) a deep faith and 2) a passionate love. Teilhard finds this supply of energy in the person of Christ, his attraction through his self-giving love.

Deep Faith

Man must be convinced that all the highest achievements of his toil are imperishable and irreversible. If they are to end in a final void and unending night he will give up, like the way trapped miners lie down to die when they know that all the exits are sealed. Only the prospect of a permanent survival can provide the dynamism for the gigantic tasks ahead.

Passionate Love

Faith is not enough. What we need more and more is love, an evergrowing love, love of each one for our fellow humans. Point Omega is brought about by the convergence of humankind upon itself. It supposes, therefore, the universal unification of all human beings

(all those who freely consent to cooperate) into some kind of super-organism. This unification must maintain *the full strength and the full light* of each individual consciousness and personality. This supposes a unification based not on extrinsic organization - which debases and depersonalizes - but on mutual respect, sympathy and love.

Real love is essentially personal. How can a human being really love the countless millions of mankind without the love becoming wholly attenuated? This obvious fact makes Teilhard take the last and the most momentous step in his reasoning.

The love of each for all and all for each (which is demanded for the success of evolution) becomes a possibility only if each man and all men fall under the spell of one powerful unifying love. Love, says Teilhard, is the most powerful and the least exploited power on earth.⁶ For the enormous tasks of the future it will have to be fully harnessed. This is possible only if man passionately loves the living, beckoning goal of his destiny, the radiant peak of ultra-reflection, Point Omega. Passionate love goes out only to a person. Hence the centre and the heart of Point Omega must be a transcendent, lovable, supremely attractive Person : not a finite person, of course, but a Person in the sense of some body who knows, who cares, who loves.

These views may be very appealing. But Teilhard admits that they cannot be called strictly "scientific" though he himself discovered them or reached them through his scientific knowledge. Teilhard's inconfusable optimism is the best available antidote against existentialist anxiety and despair. Teilhard admits that "doubtless I should never have ventured to envisage (the Omega Point) or formulate the hypothesis rationally, if, in my consciousness as a believer, I had not found not only its speculative model but also its living reality⁷

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6. cf. J.F. Donceel, op.cit. p.123.

7. The Phenomenon of Man, p.294 as quoted in J.F. Donceel, op.cit. p.124

In Grateful Memory of Fr. John Britto Chethimattam, c.m.i.

Thomas Aykara

I. Introduction

Memory is one of the most important constituents of man's consciousness. The memories we cherish shape to a great extent our personality growth and create the culture we live in. Memories do help us in moulding our attitudes and forming our world vision. Happy and pleasant memories create a fundamental attitude of gratitude, the noblest of man's attitudes, as Shakespeare would put it. Gratitude is a spiritual tonic and a superb source of psychological satisfaction that could meaningfully make one's identity really proud and powerful.

The memory of our beloved Fr. John Britto Chethimattam that we all cherish with such pride and love does evoke in all of us a tremendous sense of profound gratitude and great indebtedness. The CMI congregation, the Syro Malbar Church, the Indian Church, the Universal Church and the vast world of scholars and students all over the world will miss him very much. We miss one whom we love, admire, respect and like to be with. Fr. John Britto was such a wonderful human being; he liked everyone and all liked him. He was indeed a pleasant and powerful presence, his being was a blessing and his doings were always an embodiment of his edifying dedication and commendable commitment to the mission he was asked to take up, intellectual, pastoral and administrative, whatever that be. While we miss him so badly we are profoundly grateful to him for what he

was to all of us and for what he did for us. Hence this note of grateful memory on the occasion of his sudden demise.

II. Recollections in General

Fr. John Britto was a multidimensional man of magnificent accomplishments. He was a great Guru respected and sought after by several thousands of students and a wonderful friend and colleague to hundreds of scholars in India and abroad. He was very much one among us but amazingly unique in his being; profoundly religious in attitudes, highly intellectual in his academic career, commendably open in his views, extraordinarily simple in life style and above all, a dynamic, dedicated and delightful human being. His academic contributions are really admirable and his life has been a great blessing to all who came into contact with him. After all, our spirituality, thoughts, feelings, attitudes and vision stand constantly revealed in our life. Life is the best testimony and the most eloquent message. I feel really proud to state that Fr. John Britto's life was eloquent in simplicity, elegant in scholarship and edifying in being an exemplary CMI religious priest.

My close association with Fr. John Britto started in 1965 when I joined Dharmaram College's teaching staff as a junior lecturer in philosophy after my post graduate studies at the Papal Athenaeum, Pune. He was the prefect of studies then at Dharmaram. With immense gratitude I recall Fr. John Britto's encouragement and kindness that I enjoyed during my first years of teaching at Dharmaram. He was like an elder brother, an excellent friend and a very good guide. As I had hardly any roots at Dharmaram because of my Pune background, his support and positive approach helped me substantially in being what I am today. Of course our association continued without interruption for more than 40 years: as members of the CMI congregation, as colleagues, collaborators and working very closely as members on several committees and in taking up academic and other creative initiatives. I consider that Fr. John Britto is a tridimensional man: *pastor, professor, and prophet*.

Before I come to his triple dimensions let me draw a very brief biographical sketch. He was born at Thottakad in Kottayam District, Kerala, India on July 7, 1922. He had his schooling at Pulimcunnu and at St. Ephrem's Mannanam. In 1939 he graduated with the highest honors and joined the CMI congregation, then known as TOCD. He

made his first profession on September 15, 1942. He made his priestly training in philosophy and theology at St Joseph's Seminary, Mangalore where a select group of CMIs was sent for their studies, a seminary then run by Jesuit Fathers. He was ordained priest on April 7, 1951. He taught theology after his ordination at Sacred Heart CMI Study House at Chethipuzha. Next year he went to Rome and did his licentiate in philosophy and theology at the Gregorian University. He took his doctorate in theology in 1957.

He returned to India in the same year and started his uninterrupted teaching career lasting for more than half a century with devotion and distinction. During his teaching he took up research studies at Fordham University and at Harvard, U.S.A. In 1967 he was appointed instructor in the department of philosophy while he was working on his doctoral dissertation. Upon completion he was promoted to assistant professor at Fordham in 1968, to associate professor in 1970 and to full professor in 1979. I recollect with gratitude the admission and scholarship he so generously secured for me in 1966 for my higher studies in philosophy, at Fordham, though the authorities at Dharmaram thought differently on account of the possible differences of opinions in the school of thinking and teaching. However, the idea was soon changed next year and gave me the necessary permission for higher studies at Louvain, the original French speaking University. Fr. John Britto was very happy at the change of mind at Dharmaram and the consequent development. He taught at Fordham for more than two decades and simultaneously at Dharmaram as visiting professor till his death. All throughout his life he was an admirable teacher and ardent student, constantly in search of truth, tirelessly articulating it anew and effectively communicating it through his preaching, teaching and living it authentically.

III. Basic Orientations

(a) John Britto, the Pastor with depth

Fr. John Britto was basically a man of God's word. He understood the word of God in depth and its ramifications in the milieu of man's fast changing thinking pattern. He was an eloquent preacher, committed to his pastoral duties, and committed to the people of God. Whether he worked in India or in U.S.A. he was busy preaching the gospel which he tried to live and succeeded to a great extent in becoming the

Good News. He was deeply convinced of the Indian thinking that "knowing is becoming". On the occasion of Fr. John Britto's death a letter received from the Immaculate Heart of Mary parish, Scarsdale, New York, U.S.A. where he had served long, contained the following message: "Please accept our sympathy and condolence on this very sad news of John's passing away to his eternal reward. This wonderful man John was a blessing from God and India to Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish. He opened our minds and we became better thinkers and Christians. He was our Guru; his ideas are embedded in our minds and so, we shall remember John always. The world needs more Fr Johns. God bless John's soul and us all."

Fr. John was not a detached preacher but an involved priest. As Thomas Kadankavil writes: "He was a preacher with conviction. He is there fully where he is found." His first five publications in the fifties that appeared in Malayalam, his mother tongue, bring out beautifully well the pastor and the preacher in Fr. John. The wonderful co-operation he extended to Fr. Constantine Manalel in his farsighted and innovative works of the Teachers' Guild, and Theology Course for Laity, far in advance of Vat.II, again speaks for his pastoral commitment to the word of God and the pastoral dimension of his priestly life. He was indeed a genuine son of Bl. Chavara who was a pastor par excellence and a man for the people. God's word was food and drink for Bl. Chavara and Fr. John Britto based his life on this solid foundation of God's word and lived for human promotion and renewal of the church. Following faithfully the footsteps of Bl. Chavara, the founder of the CMJs, the pastoral dimension influenced his intellectual and prophetic life radically.

(b) John Britto, the professor with a vision of convergence

Certainly the most important dimension of his personality has been that of an eminent professor, internationally acknowledged scholar and a prominent pioneer thinker in the field of inter religious studies.

He was a philosopher, theologian and was well versed in the field of comparative religion. He was inimitably quick in perception, swift in articulation and powerful in communication. His assimilative capacity was extraordinary and he updated himself incessantly with wide and vast reading. He was very conversant with the latest publications in his field and his thoughts and lectures were greatly influenced by the

books he read last. He was a man who knew well what he knew and hence he knew well what he did not know. This, to my mind, made him very open and receptive. The enlightened are not prisoners of their perceptions. Their horizons are vast and their hearts are wide open, capable of assimilating whatever that is good. Deep reflections open our inner eyes and enable the expansion of our being, converting us into a converging consciousness. This was, perhaps, the methodology of Fr. John's thinking, open and assimilative, getting constantly renewed in thoughts and approaches, leading to a convergent consciousness. As a scholar he cannot be pigeonholed into one system of thought or a particular school only. His thoughts can hardly be compartmentalized. His approach was one of integration and synthesis.

He was indeed a prolific writer. I do not make a scientific study on his publications and naturally cannot do justice to it in this short note of tribute. His works reflect the manifold influence to which he was open and sympathetic. Consequently we find a constant evolution in his thought. Delving deep into Christian faith and mysticism he started looking for a meeting point between the East and the West. His studies on Hinduism inspired him to focus more on Indology and comparative studies, eventually leading him to the field of world religions. Inter-religious dialogue, ecumenism and Indian theology attracted his attention. He could succeed in developing a creative idea of Indian theology and was one of the pioneers of an indigenous theology.

Consciousness and Reality, Dialogue in Indian Tradition, Experience and Philosophy, are the basic works of Fr. John Britto that focus on the inner interconnectedness between unity and diversity. It is at the heart of interiority and in the depth of lived – experience that unity and diversity meet and converge. But he tries to retain the identity of the concrete and the universal. His sincere attempts at striking a balance between unity and diversity helped him reach a discordant concord, leading to an integral realization. Insisting on the importance of dialogue he tried to initiate two types of theology: the theology of dialogue and the theology for dialogue. The content of John Britto's thought in general was the whole man, transcendent and immanent, his liberation. Man's total liberation and the attainment of unlimited freedom is the final goal of all faiths, religion and philosophy was a deep conviction of John's thinking. But his inner journey in

thinking and searching, to my mind, was constantly aiming at a convergent synthesis and converging consciousness the logical derivative of his optimistic openness and ambitious assimilative intelligence.

His vast reading and fast updating spirit at times give us an apparent impression of inconsistency in his thought. But, as I understand him, there is a consistency implied in his apparent inconsistency. There is the logic of the Infinite, in the language of Sri Aurobindo, that lies hidden in the innermost layer of our being. His quest for a higher and comprehensive synthesis was the result of the inner spirit's striving for integration. Both spirituality and psychology aim at integration and have different connotations. We know that growing old is mandatory while growing up is optional. Man gets mature and integral attaining greater degree of inner freedom provided his daily needs, both D'needs and B'needs, are adequately met. Even our intellectual evolution has almost the same structure of dynamism.

Fr. John Britto's evolution of thinking and the inner consistency of his thought make us aware of the spiritual and internal dynamism working in all of us and constantly calling us to respond positively to this inner stimulus urging us from the cave of our interiority for an integration and wholeness, for a yoga of synthesis. Fr. John Britto felt at home and thought spontaneously both in the Eastern and Western patterns of approaching reality, and a convergence with difference was his consistent thread of thought.

Fr. John's scholarship was academic with several practical sides. I had the wonderful privilege of working with him in many academic and other projects. It was in 1971, on the occasion of the death centenary of Bl. Chavara, we started for the first time at Dharmaram, perhaps a first step in India, the *Centre for the Study of World Religions*. CSWR at Dharmaram has been rendering valuable service and making substantial contributions in the field of meeting of religions and inter-religious activities for the last 35 years uninterruptedly. It was in 1974 that he extended his wonderful co-operation in launching a new venture of the quarterly: *Journal of Dharma*, an international quarterly published in collaboration with three universities, one in the west and the other two in India. It was an ambitious project I preaped during my student days at Oxford with the support of my professor R.C. Zaehner of Oxford. I gratefully recall Fr. John Britto's generous

help in other accademic ventures like *Center for Indian and Inter-religious Studies (CIIS)* in Rome, the founding of *Dharma Nivas*, the CMI centre in East Orange, New Jersey, U.S.A. and several other important initiatives. We had organized together several seminars national and international. His collaboration with Fr. Constantine Manalel in founding and developing the *Jeevadhara* Research Journal, the long service he has been rendering to it in different capacities as section- Editor, Book- Review Editor and other contributions are really praise worthy. With Fr. Constantine he played a significant role in the work of Indian Theological Association and its scholarly seminars and academic contributions.

In the realization of the great dream of Dharmaram in Bangalore, a dream of Bishop Jonas Thaliath and the team, Fr. John Britto played an important and unique role. With profound gratitude I record the key role he played in the foundation of Dharmaram, especially its intellectual making and institutional development on the academic level. The generations to come at Dharmaram should recognize his place in the very making of Dharmaram what it is toady. Fr. John Britto was certainly one of the most eminent scholars who attracted the attention both in India and abroad. I found in him a wonderful person, very easy and enjoyable to work with. He was a regular member of our CMI General Chapters and almost always he served as its secretary, an excellent and efficient secretary. We worked together on several committees both within the congregation and outside. On the occasion of the Beatification of Bl Chavara and Bl. Alphonsa and the Papal visit to Kottayam we had been together on many committees and could make good contributions. Both of us worked in wonderful co-operations as Provincials of Trivandrum and Kottayam CMI Provinces. We had been instrumental in founding *Syro Malabar Religious Conference (SMRC)* in 1984. My collaboration with Fr. John Britto was both in the academic field and administrative works. While he was Rector at Dharmaram, we could again work together, especially in his construction of Dharmaram's beautiful chapel. These are only some of my experiences of working with him and I really cherish the memory of his generous co-operation and warmth in working together.

© *John Britto, the Prophet of Total Liberation*

Fr. John Britto was not only an inspiring pastor and eminent scholar but also a sincere prophet. Prophets are the mouth piece of God.

They speak to God from heart to heart. Genuine prophets have authentic God-experience. Their real power wells up from their lived experience of God. They were really spirit-filled and future-oriented in their vision and they share God's dreams. They thought differently, acted courageously and stood for the oppressed. Prophets were men of authenticity, simplicity and rich in their power of identity. They lived what they preached. They were constantly loyal to the voice of God and unconditionally involved in the struggles of the people. In this sense Fr. John Britto was a prophet. He thought differently. While he was genuinely open, he wanted to be himself. In thinking and discussing he tried to strike a differing note, but not at all at the cost of friendship and mutual respect. He was courageous in his outlook, ready to take risk-ridden initiatives and fearless in confronting, but always with charity. He wanted to be the voice of the voiceless and stand by the marginalized as far as he could. He was always for the people and with the people. His future-orientation was splendid and his tireless endeavors were all in view of the future, whether at Dharmaram or at Fordham or wherever he worked.

Fr. John Britto was an exemplary religious priest who blended beautifully well prayer and actions. His vision of synthesis and converging consciousness must have deeply influenced him in making his life a total commitment, converting the same into a life of prayer, attempting at not only to pray but to be prayer. There was an interveniency between external exercises and interiority in his practical life. That made him meticulously regular in spiritual exercises and deeply committed to his duties. He was able to strike the balance between the call of the spirit from within and the demands of the ministry and rituals outside. He was not a prisoner of the past, a slave of the present but a prophet for the future, both in his spirituality, his thoughts and above all in his life.

He was a man of transcendence and transparency. Hence he could be an unencumbered person and a prophet for the future. Prophets possess inner freedom and are liberative in all their attempts. Fr. John Britto too stood for the total freedom of man, the ultimate goal of all religions. Openness is the core of his being and the real power of his identity. His prophetic nature stems from his search for a synthesis and his quest for the convergent consciousness. His pastoral and reflective approaches combined, creatively led him to become a

prophet in life, steeped in experience, systematic in thinking and liberative in motivation.

IV. Conclusion

Fr. John Britto was an eminent scholar of rare qualities; an excellent teacher widely appreciated and an exemplary religious priest whom all loved and respected. He was a pastor of depth, a professor of high calibre and a prophet of authentic life, the beautiful triple dimensions of Fr. John Britto, blended in his ceaseless search for a convergent consciousness. This short note written in haste on the memory of Fr. John Britto is not at all systematic, but only a few spontaneous lines in compliance with the request made by our dear Frs. Constantine and Kuncheria Pathil. I really wanted to meet him in person while he was at Lakeshore Hospital for a very short time. The message that he was getting better made me postpone my visit by one day, and he died suddenly. I deeply regretted my inability. While attending his funeral service at Pulimcunnu I felt very much my deep sense of loss in his unexpected demise. This short note in grateful memory of Fr. John Britto, though not systematic and sufficiently well prepared, I deem it a symbolic compensation.

The CMI congregation has lost one of her most illustrious sons. All loved him so much, were proud of him very rightly and considered him an excellent and exemplary religious priest. Scholars and students have lost a pioneer thinker, a prolific writer and a powerful communicator. All of us will miss him because he was such a wonderful, pleasant and pleasing human being. He was indeed an amazing blessing of God. We are deeply grateful to the Lord for the beautiful gift of Fr. John Britto. We are immensely grateful to him and pray for him and promise to continue to love him as we gladly did. May God bless him and reward him abundantly for what he was and what he did for the church, society and the world.

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